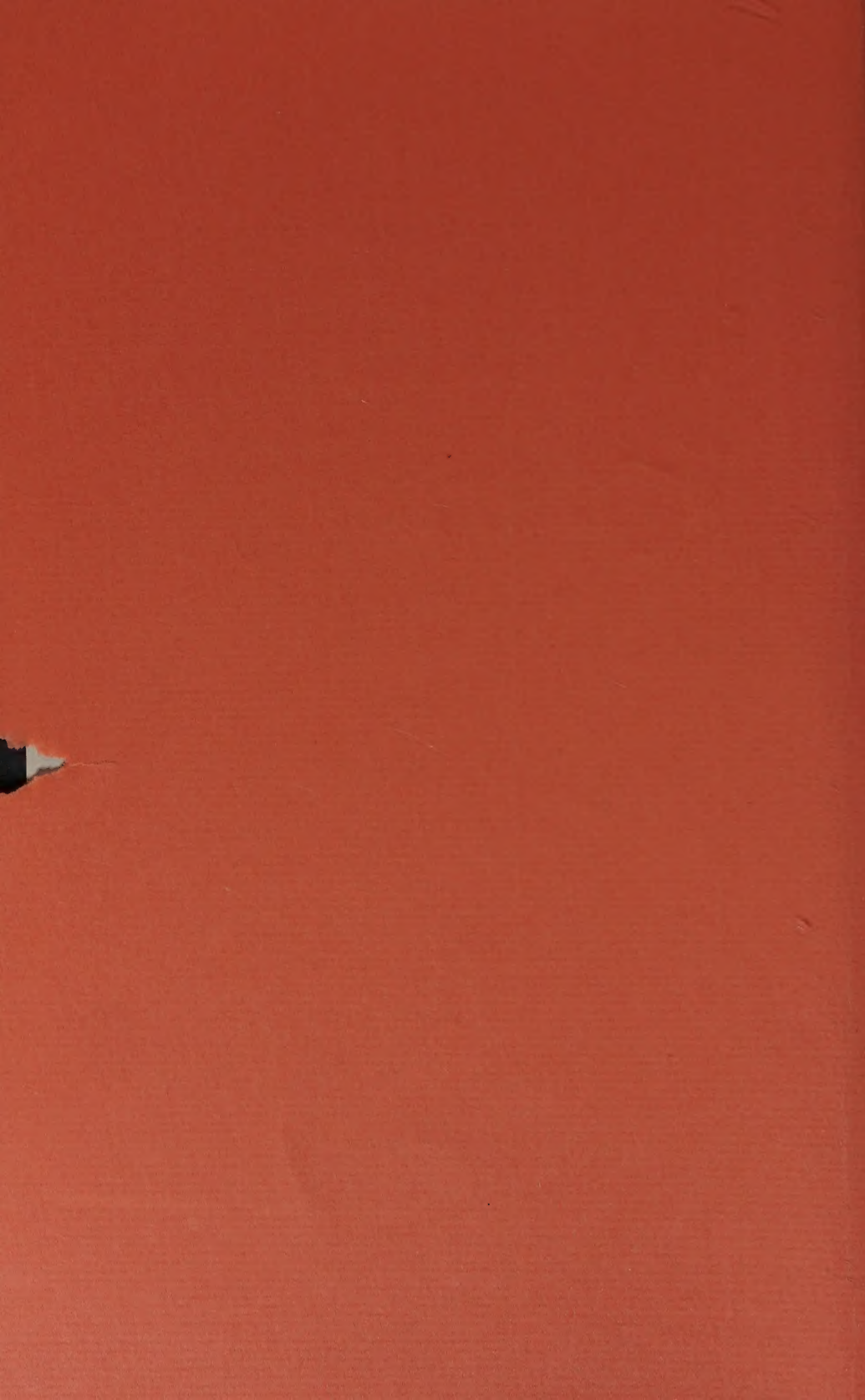


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An Introduction to Dino Campana

by

FREDI CHIAPPELLI

[Professor Fredi Chiappelli is a well known young Italian scholar and literary critic. Since 1950 he has been teaching Italian literature in Switzerland at the University of Lausanne and Neuchâtel.

A man of wide interests and versatility he has written on a great number of literary subjects. Among his more significant works are: *Lingua e stile*; *Elementi di stilistica italiana* (co-authored with Bruno Migliorini); *Langage traditionnel et langage personnel dans la poésie italienne contemporaine*; *Studi sul linguaggio del Machiavelli*.

Professor Chiappelli introduces in the following pages Dino Campana, a poet among the greatest that modern Italy has produced and we hope will become better known in America.]

"Do not give anything to man: but take something away from him and help him to carry it. After having looked me up and down, round and about, and pried right through to my wallet, the kindly policeman let me proceed, accompanying me on my way with a long glance that seemed to protect me. What is at least certain is that for a little while I felt as though a weight had been lifted from me. This also happens to me when I read a book: also when I read a book."¹ Absolute poverty and the absolute contemplation of poetry were to be the destiny of a man so completely free from any submission to matter and so taken up with the importance of feeling and of expressing himself. The need that turned Campana into a sufferer, a nomad, a sick man, was not the result of negligence or incapacity: it was the price paid by him daily for a disengaged autonomy of the spirit, which was intent on rediscovering and re-establishing the forces, values and intensity of its own world. In this way, poverty, even though it ruined

Campana's health and, hence, his physical life, did not prejudice his nature; that nature which, with fateful insight, described itself in the few pages of his that are left to us. It is not purely by chance that the first edition of the *Canti orfici* (1914) ends with the words: "They were all torn — and cover'd with — the boy's blood," as if to suggest the immense price exacted by this poetry. And, in a letter of May 1916 to Emilio Cecchi, we read: "If, dead or alive, you still give a thought to me, I beg you not to forget the final words *They were all torn and cover'd with the boy's blood*, which are the only important ones in the book. The quotation is from the *Song of Myself* by Walt Whitman, whom I adore."²

Dino Campana was born at Marradi, in the mountains of Central Italy that separate Tuscany from the plain of the river Po, on August 20, 1885, the son of an elementary schoolmaster. A letter from his mother, Fanny, to Sibilla Aleramo, speaks of his early years: "The childhood and adolescence of that boy was a wonderful thing. Peaceable, good-looking, chubby, curly-haired and intelligent, at the age of two he could recite the *Ave* in French; I was the object of everyone's envy. He was exceptionally obedient and good-natured, and his teachers at the high-school used to say that his intellectual gifts were exceptional, and told us, his parents, *he will be your consolation*."³ Then, according to an autograph of Dino, found amongst his papers, "When he was fifteen years old, his spirit overwhelmed by confusion, he began to make all sorts of mistakes, every one of which he had to expiate with great suffering.

"He kept his honor intact, although now it was no longer of any use to him, and, as witness to himself, at various intervals during his errant life, he wrote this book."⁴

The book was *Canti orfici*: the errant life, although it had originated at the time of his adolescence ("From the age of fifteen . . . I was unable to live in any one place") took him to many distant lands and to many trades whereby he earned his daily bread; all this, after the failure of an attempt to study chemistry at the University of Bologna. "I exercised some trade or other. For example, tempering tools; I would harden a scythe, or a hatchet. I managed to

make a living. I played the triangle in the Argentine navy. I was a door-keeper in a club at Buenos Aires. I had so many trades. I once helped to terrace land in Argentina. You sleep out in tents. It's easy work, but monotonous. In Argentina I had even forgotten what little arithmetic I had ever known. Otherwise, I should have taken a job as an accountant.

"I have been a stoker on cargo ships. I have been a policeman in Argentina, or, rather, a fireman: the firemen out there have to help to keep the peace. I have been to Odessa. I sold shooting-stars at fairs. The Bossiaks are like gipsy folk. They are vagabonds who go about in groups of five or six. Target-shooting in Switzerland. I knew several languages quite well."⁵

The illness that had taken hold of him—"a psychical form of hyperaesthesia"—had already led to his confinement in 1906 (from September 4 to October 31) in an asylum at Imola; then, during the course of his wanderings, again at Tournay, Belgium, in 1914. Worse was to come. "I have spent several months in prison, two or three months in Switzerland, at Basle, for disturbing the peace. I had brawled with a Swiss; some bruises. I was not convicted." He was arrested on several occasions for being without papers (for example, at Novara, on September 11, 1917). Binazzi, insisting on the rather superficial note of the *bohémien*, describes Campana in the act of selling the original edition of the *Canti orfici*, while he takes pleasure in emphasizing the picturesque aspects of the scene: "He would go from table to table, making the rounds of the best-known cafés, to sell his poems. And he would often make fun of those who bought them. He would look hard at their faces, making out their philistine natures; then, he would burst out laughing with that laugh of his that seemed to belong to some comely, bronzed faun (by the way, I have not yet mentioned the fact that Campana is a handsome youth), tearing out pages from the book he had just sold, upon the specious and hardly flattering pretext that the buyer would never have understood them. Many such amusing scenes took place at Paszkowski's in Florence." Campana comments from the

clinic in which he was to end his days: "I sold the *Canti orfici* at Paszkowski's and at the Giubbe Rosse in Florence; at the Caffé di San Pietro in Bologna. I sold that book because I was poor."⁶

* * *

The *Canti orfici* consist of some fanciful prose-passages (e.g. *La notte*), and others based on actual reminiscences (e.g. *La Verna*), alternating with poems: *I notturni* (a group of seven poems), *Varie e frammenti* (two poems), *Genova* (a long poem in seven parts). Its poetic world is a unitary one. This is all the more marked, in that in neither the prose nor verse passages does the author attempt to achieve an external completeness or an explicit declaration of motives and relationships.⁷ It is the most elementary poetic world possible, recreated in an expression capable of dealing with the greatest psychological complexity: "in the voice of the element we hear all things," as we read in the *Inediti* (p. 300). The poetic image, evoked by a direct contemplation of the elements — and nourished by the thousand and one currents of the feelings, senses, dreams, taste, and culture — becomes a coherent transfiguration of experience and, at the same time, an interpretation of its most hidden meanings (hence "orfici"). Moreover, what is more important, it rises up to an autonomous life of its own, which is particularly intense and secure, and beautiful precisely because of the complexity and rarity of its architecture.

Some readers may find certain textual difficulties disconcerting. With regard to this, we may point out that, if Campana is difficult to understand, he is so rather in inspiration than in expression. As Luzi said of the *hermetic* poets, obscurity of meaning must be accepted "as the price to be paid by someone who is destined to bring to light all that is most hidden and least defined in the real life of man."⁸ Campana, who heard *all things* in the voice of the element, could not have done otherwise than wish to express all things. Here, I should like to offer the analytical example of an image in which nothing but figurative complexities appear. It is an image taken from the poem that brings the book to a close — *Genova*:

Per i vichi marini nell'ambigua
Sera cacciava il vento tra i fanali
Preludii dal groviglio delle navi.

"Along the sea-alleys in the ambiguous
Evening the wind hunted between the street-lamps
Preludes from the clutter of ships."

This is merely the image of the wind, at nightfall, in the port of Genoa. However, the evocation of the wind, conceived as a force laden with preludes, and which pursues preludes (namely, the conjunction of the idea of music with the idea of movement and violence) is not in itself an easy image (it will be noticed that it already bears a style; it is already poetic); and it is further complicated by the picturesque image of the "clutter of ships," and by the choice of the vague, suggestive time of twilight, "the *ambiguous* evening," the moment when evening is about to be transformed into night. This choice and determination of the hour introduce and sketch out, as it were, a cold shiver in this image animated by the wind, and prolong it in the alley-ways of the port. And, over the whole, there also hovers a motif indicated at the very beginning, though indirectly, that of the *smell* of the sea: "Along the sea-alleys." These elements rise up all together, they intermingle one with the other, like sensation in the imagination, and create a complex reality, which the poet succeeds in capturing in its entire significance.

Campana's world includes, without boundaries, both dreams and reality, so that his transports always appear boundless. The association of things and images, immobility and movement, segment and arabesque, proceeds spontaneously from his poetic fantasy. It is a complex world, but one of substantial unity, which is revealed in the freedom with which the poet moves therein, and which is reflected in his language. This is essentially unitary, even in cases of interruption and repetition, and especially in its general categories: "in the *Canti orfici*, Campana nearly always aimed at imposing an impetuous movement on his composition, and, in this impetus, at unifying both rhythm and syntax."⁹

The fact of having fixed their attention solely on the

more sensational elements in Campana's world — for example, the images or impulses of movement — may have suggested to critics certain unsatisfactory comparisons with other poets, e.g., D'Annunzio, even as the atmosphere surrounding them may have brought Baudelaire to mind.¹⁰ The latter was certainly of interest to Campana, in his internal compositions, which are the most structured.¹¹ But what really matters is the poet's sure ability in this world of his, composed of nature and dreams; his natural ability to dominate it, sweep through it and retain vast, serried sections of this in each image.

The moment when Campana's mind roams unhampered through time and space is for him the moment of creation: "Recollections of gipsy-girls, of distant loves, sounds and lights: moments of weariness in love, sudden weariness on the bed of a distant tavern *another adventurous cradle of certainty and regret*" (*La notte*, in *Canti orfici*): from fact to feeling and its transfiguration, we have only a poetic interval wherein nothing is inert, and which opens up vistas along the horizon of the ineffable. We find expressed here the almost unbelievable docility with which this spirit submitted itself to a poetic inspiration that was always unitary and classical, whether it proceeded from the most elementary experience of nature or (immediately and even simultaneously) from the artist's most troubled unrest: "And here are the rocks, layer upon layer, monuments of a lonely tenacity, which console the heart of man. And my fugitive destiny has seemed sweet to me, in the fascination of the distant mirages of happiness that still smile upon the blue mountains: and in hearing the murmur of the water beneath the bare rocks, which is still fresh from the depths of the earth. And so, I am made aware of a sweet music in my memory, without remembering a single note of it: I know that its name is parting or reunion." (*La Verna*, in *Canti orfici*).

One of the aspects of this "greatness" of soul may be the synthetic quality of some images conceived at immense distance, such as, "and the shadows of human labor bent there over the cold hills [poggi argenti]" of the famous verse from *Chimera*; or, in prose, the telescopic form of a town:

"Tilted fanfare, arabesque amidst the meadows, Berne." Another aspect of this same "greatness" is the immediate sense of intimacy present in the most complex and dazzling metaphor; as in another famous passage from *Chimera*: "But for your maidenly head / Reclined, that I, nocturnal poet, / Kept vigil over the vivid stars in the depths of the sky," or in the summit of solitude represented by the image of the alpine peaks known and understood in their most secret myth: "I watch the white rocks, *the mute fountains of the winds*." The taste for color and harmonic notations, which is in any case a fully conscious one in Campana, is exalted by freedom (and led on to surprising effects that have caused critics to speak of "vision"). The poet told Dr. Pariani (*op. cit.*, p. 25) that he had wished to create "a colored musical European poetry" that had "the sense of colors, which previously did not exist in Italian poetry."

The variable metric forms, constantly adapted to the fullness of his fanciful period, must also be understood as another manifestation of this same "greatness." A qualitative prosody, which was also described by Campana in a judgment on Luisa Giaconi: "A stanza liberated from the multiform chain with two or three elementary cases of assonance expresses a purer love of light and form."¹²

I think it necessary to specify that the vehemence of Campana's poetic transports has nothing whatever to do with the progress of madness or psychic hypertension.¹³ On the contrary, it represents an extreme concentration of the individual's powers, a considerable detachment from the chains of matter, and hence a capacity of the spirit, in its intensely free unity, to obey the slightest impulse with great impetus. "We know life as it is: now, let us dream of life in the mass. Mysticism is also one of the last stages of life in the mass, but it is a form of the spirit, which is always speculative, always rational, always inhibitory, in which the world is representation and will: will and representation, which makes the world the basis of a luminous cone, whose rays are concentrated on a point in the infinite, in nothingness, in God. Yes: *it is necessary to sweep over life, it is the only art possible*" (*Inediti*, p. 301). Thus, the most delicate and intricate texture of feeling and sensation can be preserved in a strong,

sure expression, as in the image of the preludes of wind. Similarly in this picture, where the freedom and obedience of the spirit to the slightest presence of life, the sense of the infinite in action, the clarity of tone and sculptural quality of figuration, all contribute to form a like creative power and to illumine a classical, conclusive centrality of feeling:

“a bunch of withered flowers in the corner with a large sign on the window-panes, and I stood on tiptoe watching the panes, to see whether my love was there, and she was not.

“The roadway was dark and narrow at the corner of the large square.

“Repetition. Why describe all that? And yet, however withered the bunch of flowers, I felt a great peace descend upon me.” (*Inediti*, p. 259).

The correspondence between Campana and Sibilla Aleramo extends from July 22, 1916, to January 17, 1918. It consists of fifty-six items including letters, cards, fragments, and telegrams, and thirty-six letters written by Aleramo, as well as some other papers. It is a slender, significant collection, which must be added to the fragments of letters published here and there, and which whets our appetite for the publication of all of Campana's letters that can possibly be traced. “At the time of this correspondence the ripe season of poetry has already passed over Campana's life. . . . They are the projection of a talent that has already reached its zenith and given its ripest fruit, sudden, capricious flashes of inspiration that still bear his imprint; but the creative will is now disarmed. Nevertheless, we find Campana's gifts of illusion and rapture still intact, although perhaps irritated beyond measure. They have their faithful counterpart in the churlish outbursts, and, more and more, in the dark clashes with reality. “. . . He remained a defenceless spirit, exposed to squalls of exaltation and fierce disillusionment and disgust . . . Indeed, we may find anything in Campana, except reserve or circumspection or even, quite simply, any kind of balance in his attitude towards life.”¹⁴ The absolute volatility and freedom of Campana's spirit, which could be moved by a policeman's kindly glance, were

impelled by love to dizzy heights of alternating happiness and pain. Even the intimacy of the most secret feeling takes on an aspect of violence, the surge towards further horizons: "Although I have hardly shaken hands with you, O apprehensive beauty, I see you here silhouetted against my thoughts and the landscape." His rare moments of transport towards happiness remind one of that movement of flight towards illusion, and conglomerations of light and natural reflections on man's shadow, which is characteristic of the *Notturmi* (especially *Chimera*): "I set out on my way this morning. The weather was magnificent and the whole morning I thought of you, as though trying to gather about you the last splendors of the beautiful season in the damp meadows, an intense velvety green." (p. 53). The signs of despair alternate with these and become more frequent. It is impossible to tell whether it was passion that irritated and precipitated the poet's illness, or whether it was the illness that vitiated and devastated his passion. "As you know, my head is empty. Filled with the hiemal wind that fills this valley of hell. Winter amuses me. I feel that something remains after all, like that small lake down there in its transparency, which nothing manages to obscure. It amuses me to see it shivering. I am satisfied with little, as you see. Happiness is made up of the most trivial things: when, of course, happiness is within us: in me? in you?" (p. 50); "I have already told you that I would rather kill myself than live with you. . . . Leave me alone . . ." (p. 107, facsimile of the autograph on p. 81). "I do not exist, my love . . . I met you, and may my life have done you some slight good, my Rina. My words are useless, like my life, I know. I do not want you to remember me. Do not write to me. I love you. . ." (p. 140). The increasingly convulsive signs of madness were interrupted by moments of calm, when the man tried to take a grip on himself, looked about in order to overcome his wretchedness, and attempted to find a job. For example, we have a letter, which certainly belongs to March-April 1917 (since it is dated from Rubiana), written to Mario Novaro: "Dear Sir, I am still most sincerely obliged to you for what you have wished to do for me. Now, reasonably well-recovered from a serious illness, I take the liberty of offering you my labors, in case you should wish to make trial of them for your re-

view or even for a business. I have a fair knowledge of almost five languages. I should like to lead a sedentary life in some pleasant seaside town, since, apart from having given up every kind of literary work, I have one leg far heavier than the other. Please excuse these details and the way in which they are expressed. I beg you to believe in the sincerity of my request. Sir, please accept my respectful greetings, I remain, Yours faithfully, Dino Campana—Villa Irma. Rubina (Turin)—P.S. I am above all a man of honor and conscience and I have always loved Liguria, which has given us the last Italian verses. Forgive me.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, his fate was already sealed. Dino’s tormented days led to the three lines sent to Sibilla Aleramo from the asylum at San Salvi, on January 17, 1918: “Dear One—If you think that I have suffered enough, I am ready to give you what remains of my life.—Come and see me, I beg you, your Dino.” This surrender had not eradicated in the poet the memory of the storms of this last vicissitude of his life. He retained the picture of “Monstrous facts and scenes of terror and horror, and, finally, in the struggle of passion, the triumph of innocence” (p. 147).

On January 28, 1918, at the age of thirty-two, Campana had to be taken to the asylum of Castel Pulci. He remained there fourteen years, until his death on March 1, 1932, from “acute primitive septicaemia, or direct virulent microbial infection of the blood.”¹⁶

* * *

Of Dino Campana there remain the *Canti orfici*, the small volume of the *Altri scritti*, and some letters, which, I hope, will some day be published. His poetic task, one of the most resolute in modern poetry, tended towards an ever-new totality of art, creating figures in which man’s life, the colors and forms of nature, the expanses of time and space, of inner existence, reveal their mutual values, in constant movement and composition: sufficient signs remain of these to prove their classical quality.¹⁷ There even remains an elementary definition of them, a formula pronounced with ascetic precision in one of the phrases the sick poet told his doctor: “I put memories into the Italian landscape.”

Translated by J. A. Scott

NOTES:

- (1) *Inediti*, p. 296. Quotations are taken from *Canti orfici*, edited by Enrico Falqui, Florence, Vallecchi, 1941; *Inediti*, ed. by E. Falqui, Florence, Vallecchi, 1942; *Canti orfici e altri scritti*, ed. by E. Falqui, Florence, Vallecchi, 1952; Dino Campana and Sibilla Aleramo, *Lettere*, ed. by Niccolò Gallo, with a preface by Mario Luzi, Florence, Vallecchi, 1958. Tribute must be paid to Enrico Falqui for the scrupulous care and discretion with which he edited the first two volumes, and then the comprehensive text, accompanying them with illustrative appendices. For a history of the text, see the first chapter of G. Bonalumi's *Cultura e poesia in Campana*, Florence, Vallecchi, 1953.
- (2) Notes to *Canti orfici*, p. 189. Falqui points out that Whitman's text actually begins: "The three were . . ."
- (3) *Lettere*, p. 106. Luzi comments in the Preface: "The mother's words with their humble and slightly melancholy tone place about the poet's head the poor halo of common hardships; even as those of every unhappy mother seem to uphold with the strength of their resignation the weight of an undeserved misfortune and punishment, while they cling to hope beyond discomfort, and shower forth an uneasy care. They here correct with an accent of precision and, as it were, of sanctity, whatever 'heroism' can be found elsewhere." For Campana's youth and studies, as well as for the beginning of his illness, see Gino Gfrola, *Dino Campana*, Sansoni, Florence, 1955. / e
- (4) Note to *Canti orfici*, p. 182. It should be noted, in order to avoid the misunderstanding between authentic inspiration and pathological exaltation (the "confusion of the spirit"), that the book was written during the "intervals." When the illness was to take complete hold of him, Campana no longer wrote anything.
- (5) This direct testimony of Campana's is a commentary to the Preface by Bino Binazzi for the reprint of *Canti orfici*, 1928. It was collected and published by the doctor who looked after him: Carlo Parini, *Vite non romanzate di Dino Campana e di Evaristo Boncinelli scultore*, Florence, Vallecchi, 1938, for which see note 13. According to Gerola, p. 36, the Argentine trip took place in 1908.
- (6) Notes to *Canti orfici*, p. 179. The Binazzi passage is reprinted in *Antichi, moderni e altro*, Florence, Vallecchi, 1941, p. 262. It quotes a postcard written by the poet: "I am sad unto death and shall die soon, my dear Bino, I send you an affectionate kiss for all the love we have *not* felt for each other." As far as the reliability of Binazzi's reprint is concerned, cf. the poet's decisive judgement expressed in a letter to his brother, of

June 2, 1930 (op. cit., p. 181): "Dear Manlio, some time ago I happened to see the reprint of my *Canti orfici* published by Vallecchi, Florence. During some moments of tranquillity, I was able to note the continual errors in the text, which is unrecognizable. They have even added some imaginary poems. I am no longer capable of attending to literary studies, even while seeing the text ruined in this way. I beg you to look up Marradi's original edition (Ravagli) and to keep it as a souvenir. I do not need anything and continue to lead a normal life. Best wishes to all the family. Your affectionate brother always, Dino Campana."

- (7) The intermittent, fragmentary character of Campana's poetry and prose, which is more apparent than substantial, has been quite erroneously understood as "shortness of breath." It is not hard to recognize that it certainly derives from the condensation of the poet's thought (e.g. in *Storia*) and, also in the "unfinished works," from the absolute, synthetic nature of his inspiration.
- (8) Mario Luzi, "Situazione della poesia italiana di oggi," in *Trivium*, 1949, pp. 200-213.
- (9) De Robertis in *Scrittori del 900*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1940, pp. 381-384. For the ability to "associate initial immobility with the movement dialectically resulting from it, by setting forth a figure before a long stretch of horizon," see G. Contini, in *Esercizi di lettura*, Florence, Le Monnier, 3rd. ed., 1947, pp. 18-28.
- (10) The "indications of a tendency towards aestheticism" (cf. Gargiulo, *Letteratura italiana del 900*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1943, pp. 359 ff.) have led to frequent mention of the name of D'Annunzio. Seroni ("Lettura di Campana" in *Ragioni critiche*, Florence, Vallecchi, 1944, pp. 73-83) develops this, as he does for the name of Carducci, mentioned by De Robertis for "his liking for vivid, coarse things." We will not discuss here these influences, limited essentially to the formative years. Nor is this the place to mention the stylistic blemishes, which may nevertheless dazzle and mislead the reader with reminiscences of *Lacerba*, Futurism, or that which is blindly called Impressionism. A penetrating attempt to distinguish successive experiences in such disparate effects is to be found in Montale's article in *Italia che scrive*, August, 1942. An outline in the article "Cultura di Campana" in Bonalumi's work already quoted, see also Gerola's book, pp. 19-21. A further examination is still wanting: namely, of the way in which it is possible to make in the first rough outline, sketched out with partially borrowed forms, the surging of the vein of original inspiration, which has an irresistible elementariness about it.
- (11) And even in images of existence, such as the *vin de la paresse*, a theme developed on several occasions by Campana in *Storie*, Gargiulo, op. cit., p. 362, perceives an "affinity" with Baudelaire.

laire, rather than a direct influence. See also F. Maticotta, "D.C. e alcuni suoi inediti," in *Prospettive*, March 15, 1941. Solmi in *Circoli*, January 1939, mentions Rimbaud and Lautréamont.

- (12) Letter to Mario Novaro, accompanying the highly Campanian poem *Dianora* by Luisa Giaconi (Florence, 1870-1908), reprinted by Falqui in *Inediti*, p. 321. As far as prosody is concerned, it should be pointed out that a considerable amount of discussion has raged as to whether the "poetry" or "prose" should be considered the "best part" of Campana's work. It does not seem to me that this discussion has been of any great help towards an understanding of Campana, since no study has yet appeared, wherein the rhythmical values of both parts are evaluated with regard to the author's inspiration, although even Montale has treated the subject, affirming that Campana found his "best system" in prose. (*Italia che scrive*, August 1942).
- (13) Bonalumi, *op. cit.*, p. 25, has some pertinent remarks to make, when he criticizes the theoretical part of Pariani's "scientific" biography: "Whereas the work is more than useful for exegesis, on account of the self-critical judgments that abound in the various dialogues with the poet, it is on the other hand extremely weak where the author wishes to establish any kind of connection between Campana's poetry and the various symptoms of madness." Boine's remark strikes us as an excessive play on words ("But Campana is, God willing, a madman in earnest"), in which Solmi perceives "the outline of a profound idea." Boine *Plausi e botte*, 3rd. ed., Modena, Guanda, 1939, pp. 224-230; Solmi in *Circoli*, January 1939.
- (14) Mario Luzi in his Preface to the *Lettere*, p. 10. An episode of 1916, which just preceded the poet's meeting with Aleramo, is described, with the help of some letters, by F. Maticotta, in "Il poeta e la pitonessa," *Il Mondo*, March 25, 1950.
- (15) *Inediti*, p. 327. The conversations with Doctor Pariani reveal notes of great tranquillity, in which the weariness brought on by illness appears in a touching manner.
- (16) Falqui, Appendix to the *Canti orfici*, p. 179.
- (17) Carlo Bo wrote in 1940: "Campana has remained almost unknown after a first brief period of false notoriety . . . The discovery of his work made by the younger generation in recent years has helped to increase and strengthen our poetic consciousness. It is as though during these twenty years of waiting his work had acquired a greater sense of the future and a total image of truth . . . At any rate, Campana's work is beginning to be of importance, and if he is to exert an influence, it will necessarily be a pondered inspiration, something more exact than a stirring up of customs and fashions." (*Il libro italiano*, April 1940).

Poems by Dino Campana



Voyage to Montevideo

I saw from the deck of the ship
The hills of Spain
Disappear, into the green
Within the golden dusk the brown earth concealing
Like a song:
In the unknown scene the girl alone
Like a blue
Tune, on the hills' slope a violet trembling. . . .
The azure evening languished upon the sea:
Yet now and then the gilded silences of wings
Crossed slowly in a wave of azure . . .
Painted in the distance of the various colors
From the remotest silences
In the blue evening crossed the golden birds: the ship
Now blindly crossing striking the darkness
With our shipwrecked hearts
Striking the darkness its blue wing upon the sea.
But one day
There came aboard ship the pregnant Spanish matrons
With their turbid, angelic eyes
Their breasts, vertigo-heavy. When
In the deep bay of an equatorial island
In a bay peaceful and deep far more than the night sky
We saw rising in the enchanted light
A white city sleeping
Under the spent volcano's highest peaks
In the turbid breath of the equator: Until
After the many shouts and shadows of unknown land
After much clanking of chains and kindled fervor
We left the equatorial city
For the restless sea at night.
We voyaged, voyaged for day after day: the ships

Heavy with sail soft with warm breezes passed by us slowly
So close that from our deck we could see, bronzed
A girl of the new race.
Shining eyes and clothes in the wind! And see: wild at the
 end of the day there appeared
 The wild shore there above the limitless beach:
 And I saw how like vertiginous
 Mares the dunes unbridled themselves
 Toward the endless plain
 Deserted without human houses
 And we turned fleeing the dunes, there appeared
 On a sea yellow with the prodigious wealth of the river,
 The marine capital of the new continent.
 Limpid fresh and electric was the light
 Of evening and the tall houses there seemed deserted
 Down on the pirate's sea
 Of the city abandoned
 Between the yellow sea and the dunes.

Translated by William Weaver.



Woman from Genoa

You brought me a bit of seaweed
 Caught in your hair, and in your tanned body
 There was the fragrance of the wind
 That traveled from afar and
 Reached me laden with passion:
 —Oh the divine
 Simplicity of your slender body . . .
 Not love, not anguish, but a phantom,
 A shadow of that compulsion that wanders
 Through the soul inevitable and serene
 Dissolving it into joy, into serene enchantment
 So that the sirocco
 May carry it away into endless space.
 How small the world is and how light in your hands!

Translated by Carlo L. Golino.

"O Poem Poem Poem"

O poem poem poem
Rise, rise, rise
Up from the electric fever of the night street
Cast off the ambiguous elastic silhouettes
Flash in outburst and sudden roar
Above the monotonous anonymous barrage
Of voices tireless as the waves
At the crossroads screams the devious slut
Because the dandy stole her puppy dog
A cricketish coquette hops
From walk to walk all green
And my inwards are flayed by the iron scraping of the tram
Silence—a lightning gesture
Has begotten a rain of stars
From a flank that buckles and crumbles under the prestigious blow
In a bloody cloak velvet and glinting
Silence still. Dry and dull
The comment of a revolver announcing
And ending another destiny

Translated by Lowry Nelson, Jr.

•

Fantasy on a Painting of Ardengo Soffici

Face, anatomical zigzag clouding
The sullen passion of an old moon
That stares hanging from the ceiling
Of a tavern café chantant
In America: the red swirl
Of lights *tightrope walker tangoing*
Ash-colored Spanish girl
Hysterical in tango of lights she fades:
That stares in the café chantant
In America:
On the hammered surface three
Little red flames have lit themselves.

Translated by Lowry Nelson, Jr.

The Chimera

I know not if among rocks it was
That your pale face appeared to me,
Or if you were a smile
From unknown distances,
The bent, ivory, gleaming
Forehead, oh young sister
Of the Gioconda:
Oh the springtimes extinguished
In your mythical pallors,
O Queen, O adolescent Queen:
But it was because of your unknown poem
Of voluptuousness and grief,
Musical, bloodless, girl,
Poem marked by a line of blood
In the circle of curving lips,
Queen of melody:
But for your maidenly head
Reclined, that I, nocturnal poet,
Kept vigil over the vivid stars in the depths of the sky,
I, for your soft mystery,
I, for your silent change.
I know not if the pallid flame of her hair
Was the living sign of her pallor
Or perhaps a sweet vapor,
Sweet to my sorrow,
Smile of a nocturnal visage:
I watch the white rocks, the mute fountains of the winds,
And the immobility of the firmaments
And the swollen rivers that flow weeping
And the shadows of human labor bent there over the cold
hills
And again through the tender heavens distant clear shadows
running
And again I call you I call you Chimera.

Translated by William Weaver.

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Nievo, the Writer: Tendencies in Criticism

by

OLGA RAGUSA

[Miss Olga Ragusa teaches Italian at Columbia University. A student of comparative literature, Miss Ragusa has long been interested in Franco-Italian literary problems and has already published a volume in this field: *Mallarmé in Italy*. Her interest in Nievo is of long standing and the present essay has been inspired in part by the recent and excellent translation of Nievo's major novel (*The Castle of Fratta* translated by Lovett F. Edwards) which Miss Ragusa reviewed in a previous number (*IQ* I, 4). Miss Ragusa's article should prove a fitting introduction to Nievo's work.]

Except to the specialist, Ippolito Nievo has always been the author of a single work. That work to be sure, was of more than respectable size and it was, in addition, a perfect vehicle for the emotional echoes which mention of the Risorgimento never failed to stir in the children, the grand-children, and the great-grand-children of the men who experienced it. In recent years other national vicissitudes have taken the place once occupied by the memory of the historical events which made Italy an independent and united nation, and new heroes and villains have displaced the old. In the fifty-odd years, roughly speaking, which straddle the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the average reader turned to *Le confessioni di un ottuagenario*, "The Confessions of an Octogenarian," (only since 1931 has the book's original title, *Le confessioni di un italiano*, "The Confessions of an Italian," been restored), with affectionate pride. In its first sentence, "I was born a Venetian 18 September 1775 . . . and shall die, by the grace of God, an Italian . . .," he saw not only in concentrated form what the content of the novel before him was to be, as Nievo indeed intended that he should see, but he saw also an ideal

form, the transformation which his own immediate forebears had undergone and which he himself was still, to a smaller or larger degree, undergoing. This second perception, of course, was likewise within Nievo's intention, for Nievo belonged to a time in which art had to have a social and educational function. Almost a century earlier, Parini had appropriated for himself the Horatian formula, *utile dulci*, thereby combining the poet and the educator in classical unity. Alfieri and Foscolo had given the figure of the poet new vigor and had broadened the field of action for the educator, making of him a champion of causes, a patriot, a fighter. Italy's properly Romantic writers, in the '30s, the '40s, the '50s, had followed Jacopo Ortis in interpreting passion as, to an unusually large extent, patriotic passion. In these writers, other elements of Romanticism, such as nature, imagination, sentiment and sentimentality, individualism, and moralism, were also present, but as the reflection of a diffuse tendency in taste, rather than as intimate conviction and necessity. It is because of this particular vision of the individual in society, which was characteristic of Italian Romanticism and of the Risorgimento, that Nievo does not consider the telling of "my nature, my talent, my early education and the progress of my destiny," sufficient justification for writing a novel. "Nothing of all this would be unusual or worth the telling," he says, except that "an account of my experiences will serve as an example of those countless individual destinies that, from the breaking up of the old political orders to the refashioning of the present one, together compose the great national destiny of Italy."

Nievo's opening paragraphs reveal unconsciously the roots of what are considered the novel's shortcomings: excessive length, superabundant subject matter, intricate plot, moralistic preoccupations, lack of harmony between the first and the second part of the book, the autobiographical framework, in brief, what Croce called "the bad design of the book." But while the line of tension between the two poles of individual and general destiny created no difficulties for Nievo himself, and he passed with ease and naturalness from the lyrical, evocative, and intimate first chapters to the adventuresome and mannered later ones, it did contribute a

good deal to obscuring the critical problem involved. Critics, misled by the overt patriotic, moralistic, and political emphasis, and further confused by Nievo's own participation in Garibaldi's 1859 and 1860 campaigns, were, for many years, satisfied with classifying the work merely historically as a novel of the Risorgimento, transferring to it the statement made by Guerrazzi apropos of his *Assedio di Firenze* ("The Siege of Florence", 1836); "I wrote this book because I could not take part in a battle. When circumstances prevent us from wielding the sword, let us take hold of the pen, let us marshal the forces which will lead to battles and victories." The figure of Nievo thus became fixed in the formula, "the poet-soldier," which Dino Mantovani, his first biographer (*Il poeta soldato*, 1900), borrowed from Giuseppe Cesare Abba, Nievo's companion in the *Mille* expedition. Abba, recounting that campaign in *Da Quarto al Volturno*, 1880 (Quarto, near Genoa, the starting point, the river Volturno, north of Naples, site of the final victorious battle), recalled having first seen Nievo in the broken-down carriage which housed Garibaldi's administrative and financial offices; "Nievo is a Venetian poet, who at twenty-eight has written novels, ballads, and tragedies. He will be the poet-soldier of the expedition. Sharp profile, soft eyes, genius shining on his brow. A striking figure. A fine soldier." Influenced by the ambiguous interpretation arising from the juxtaposition of the two completely different concepts of soldier and of poet, Croce himself in 1911 (*La letteratura della nuova Italia*) defined Nievo as essentially a man of action, interested in the representation of events more than in their analysis, a man who, had he lived, might well have given up literature altogether and turned to politics or public administration instead. No doubt Croce was writing also under the immediate impression of Nievo's administrative report of the Sicilian campaign ("Resoconto amministrativo della prima spedizione in Sicilia") and of his diary of the same expedition ("Diario della spedizione dal 5 al 28 maggio"), both of which had just been published by Alessandro Luzio (*Risorgimento italiano*, III, April 1910; *La lettura*, May 1910) and gave ample evidence of Nievo's efficient handling of practical matters. Be that as it may, the critical orientation which resulted from an interference between lit-

erary and extra-literary elements in Nievo's life was also applied directly to *Le confessioni* and caused them to be read as an allegory in which Pisana, the heroine, personifies Italy, which, through suffering and the struggle for ideals, passed from the frivolous existence of the eighteenth century to new dignity and became deserving of renewed life as a nation.

Critical opinion on Nievo, the writer, thus crystallized around non-literary elements. Based on an epithet coined by a soldier, this line of criticism quickly exhausted its viability but not its general acceptance. The reasons for its survival are the same that Carducci pointed out in connection with another expressive and popular but inexact formula: that which quoted Sir Walter Scott as calling *I promessi sposi* his best novel. In a scathing page (*Opere*, XX, p. 363) Carducci speaks of the flattering half-truths which circulate, for a season, in every book, in every salon, in every club, and then go to add to the load of erudite misinformation from which schoolmasters and hasty journalists draw their knowledge.

But while the figure of Nievo continued to be seen in a non-literary light and the search for arresting phrases went so far as to identify him with fascist *squadrismo* (N. Taroni, *Ippolito Nievo*, 1932, p. 187) and more recently with the partisan movement (L. F. Edwards, "Foreword," *The Castle of Fratta*, 1958, p. xv), literary historians began to consider Nievo's work more or less independently of his life, eventually studying it in its entirety and examining the relation between its various parts. The first of these, Adolfo Albertazzi (*Il romanzo*, "The Novel," 1902) pointed out possible influences felt by Nievo—the obvious ones of Manzoni, Carcano, George Sand; the less obvious of Chateaubriand, who in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1849-50) had written a confession in the tone of an epic poem, and of Balzac, who in the *Comédie humaine* had succeeded in giving unity to an exceedingly complex subject matter—and also traced the evolution of Nievo's art from his first two novels, *Angelo di bontà* ("The Good Angel," 1856) and *Il conte pecoraio* ("The Shepherd Count," 1857) to *Le confessioni*. Gino Raya (*Il romanzo*, 1950) and Guido Mazzoni (*L'Ottocento*, "The Nineteenth Century," 1934) did little more than follow

in Albertazzi's steps, though Raya did so most unimaginatively and schematically, while Mazzoni added a sensitive analysis of Carlo and Pisana and supplied mention of other works of Nievo: *Il Varmo* (name of a tributary stream of the Tagliamento, 1856), *Il barone di Nicastro* ("The Baron of Nicastro," 1856), and *Il pescatore d'anime* ("The Fisher of Souls," which Nievo had barely started at the time of his death in 1861).

As was still customary in the nineteenth century, Nievo made his literary debut as a poet, publishing a nuptial song, *Il crepuscolo* ("Twilight") in 1852 and a collection of verse in 1854, which latter revealed his affinity with the satirist Giusti. Although Nievo was to continue writing poetry down to the charmingly entitled *Gli amori Garibaldini* ("Love Episodes under Garibaldi," 1860), he very quickly turned to other genres as well. His important study on national and folk poetry in Italy, *Studi sulla poesia popolare e civile massimamente in Italia*, long neglected by critics, dates from 1854, and his *Antiafrodisiaco per l'amore platonico* ("Counteraphrodisiac for Platonic Love"), a long and humorous narrative, written under the influence of unpleasant episodes and childish anger, and not published until 1956, probably goes back as far as 1851. Nievo was the author of a number of comedies (as yet unpublished) and of at least two tragedies published by Vincenzo Errante in 1914 and 1919. He translated Heine, ancient Greek odes, and contemporary Greek folk and battle songs, and, in the field of politics, he wrote, in addition to the reports previously mentioned, *Venezia e la libertà d'Italia* ("Venice and Italian Liberty"), a pamphlet pleading for the annexation of the Venetian provinces in 1859, and jotted down some notes for what would have been become an extremely important and far-sighted consideration of internal problems, *Sulla rivoluzione nazionale* ("On the National Revolution"), setting forth the necessity of integrating the underprivileged and illiterate Italian peasant population into the political life of the new nation.

It was, however, as a narrative writer that, as we have seen, Nievo was to be remembered. Recognition on this point came late, for *Le confessioni*, though written in 1857-8, were

not published until 1867, posthumously, and Nievo continued to be known during his life time as primarily a poet. This in spite of the fact that he had from the very beginning published extensively in countless reviews scattered throughout Lombardy and Venetia (the stories so published have been collected recently under the generic title of *Novelle campagnuole* or *Novelliere campagnolo*, "Country Tales," and brought out by both Mondadori and Einaudi in 1958), and had completed two full-length novels, *Angelo di bontà* and *Il conte pecoraio* immediately before starting *Le confessioni*. In recalling the vicissitudes that led to the latter's publication, Eugenio Checchi ("Preface," *Le confessioni*, 1899) tells how Erminia Fuà Fusinato, wife of the writer Arnaldo Fusinato, intimate friend of Nievo, one day handed him a manuscript, begging him for his opinion. Checchi, who was on the point of leaving for his summer vacation, was shocked by the bulk of the note-books thrust into his hand, page after page completely covered by "thin, close, implacable handwriting, without an erasure, an addition, a revision." Of course, once he started reading, he could not set the book aside until he had finished it. And so this long tale, which follows Carlino from his arrival at the Castle of Fratta, as a few-days-old infant, to his old age, eighty years later, saw the light through the ready intervention of Felice Le Monnier, who included it in his Biblioteca Nazionale, that collection of classical and contemporary works which more than any other reflects the whole changing history of the Risorgimento.

Le confessioni is the history of an epoch. It is a historical novel, but its historical frame and its historical background are the immediate past, the experiences through which Nievo himself and his immediate forebears had lived. It is also the story of a life-long passion, Carlino's love for his flirtatious cousin, Pisana, who in her irritating changeability has reminded some readers of Albertine, but who may actually have had an older and closer sister in Manon. *Le confessioni* is a rapid review of all important political and military episodes in Italian history from the first infiltration of the ideas of the French Revolution, through the Napoleonic campaign of 1796, the collapse of the centuries-old

Venetian Republic, the inauguration of the Cisalpine Republic in Milan, the Neapolitan rebellion of 1799, other developments of Napoleon's conquests in the various regions of Italy, the years of exile in London, the participation of Italian patriots in the fight to liberate Greece, the revolutionary movements of 1830 and 1848, including even a brief expedition into the wilds of South America, whither we follow one of Carlino's sons after he finds life in divided and strife-torn Italy impossible. *Le confessioni*, a first-person narrative, is the perfect vehicle for Nievo's psychological probing, for his moral and political commentary, for his very personal nostalgia of a dead world, and his fervent hopes for the future. In *Il Varmo*, a novellette set in the Friulian countryside and portraying the affectionate love of two peasant children, brought up as brother and sister in the same family, Nievo had already foreshadowed the wonderful pages of *Le confessioni* where the little boy Carlino first falls under the spell of the tyrannical and capricious Pisana. In *Angelo di bontà*, the love-story of an innocent and wholesome girl and a young Venetian dandy, Nievo had indulged his dream of eighteenth-century Venetian life and had revealed for the first time the extraordinary knowledge of social and political conditions under the Republic which he was to treat later with such light and deft touch in his evocation of the backward feudal world of Fratta. In *Il conte pecoraio*, a tale of social injustice and class conflict, he had laid the foundation for a deepened understanding of the peasantry and of the country clergy, which was to find further expression in some of the minor characters of *Le confessioni*. Nievo's narrative work, of which *Le confessioni* is the culminating point, thus shows a remarkable uniformity of inspiration and a close correlation of subject matter.

It was exclusively on the basis of *Le confessioni* that early critics formulated their estimation of Nievo's special gifts as a storyteller. Praise went to his observant eye which excelled at picking out significant details and rejoiced in the variety and richness of perceptions that the senses can offer. His description of the kitchen of Fratta and of the crowded gallery of characters that congregated in it (see my

review of *The Castle of Fratta*, IQ, Vol. I, No. 4) was singled out for special attention and quickly became an anthology piece. But examples of Nievo's descriptive ability are abundant. We would like to quote the following incisive evocation of Piazza San Marco at the hour of the *passeggiata*: "The crowd of strollers was at its densest, and varied was the chatter of merry companies, the shuffling of feet, and the rustling of cloaks. High and piercing was the shouting of fruit-vendors, of water peddlers, of hawkers of ices, and of clowns who held forth at the puppet stands" (*Angelo di bontà*, p. 98). As a matter of fact, the whole first chapter of *Angelo di bontà*, rightly chosen by Sergio Romagnoli for inclusion in the Ricciardi edition of Nievo's *Opere* (1952), should be mentioned. Here, with the sureness of brush of a master and with complete indifference toward the conventions of the well constructed narrative, in which the identification and description of characters precedes their entrance upon the scene of action, Nievo has made use of impressionistic techniques reminiscent of eighteenth-century Venetian painting and of the rapid shifts in perspective which the motion picture makes possible today. Perhaps the particular setting of Venice, lapped by shimmering and shifting waters all about, lends itself especially well to the oblique, indirect style of writing of this chapter. At any rate, it is interesting to note the remarkable similarity of feeling which, through the use of analogous techniques, emanates from another writer's Venetian tale, Anna Banti's little gem, "Lavinia fuggita" (*Le donne muoiono*, 1952).

Nievo's descriptive gift, which in its idyllic tone is employed to best advantage when he speaks of the Friulian countryside (*Il conte pecoraio* and *Il Varmo* are antecedents of *Le confessioni* in this sense too), is allied to his sharp wit and ready sense of humor. This trait, too, is apparent almost anywhere, from the simple juxtaposition of contrasting ideas ("in the workroom the maids were stretched out on their favorite cot," or "the young girl took her father's hand and held it on her heart for a long time, gently caressing it, until he, less gently, pulled it away to pour himself some wine") to elaborate accounts, such as that of the steps by which the Count, father of Monsignor Orlando, had to

renounce the ambition of having a "military glory" in the family (*The Castle of Fratta*, pp. 7-11), or that of the wonderfully comic alliance between the noble Lady Cecilia and the ineffectual *podestà* of Asolo, her husband (*Angelo di bontà*, pp. 135, 188-9). Nievo's humorous remarks stand ever ready to counterbalance the tedious effect which his repeated exhortations to virtue might otherwise have. They reflect his conciliatory attitude towards life, his deep affection for mankind. "Life as I experienced it," he says "was on the whole good." But this is not how Nievo's sense of humor was seen by Croce, for the critic found an intolerable contrast between Nievo's ironical expressions and the fiction of the eighty-year old narrator, who at other times looks back upon his life with sweet and tender longing. Especially unpalatable does Croce find the manner in which the protagonist speaks of his mother's elopement and marriage, her rapid return to Venice, her subsequent concubinage with a Swiss captain, and his own birth, a narration much too crude and cynical, Croce thinks, to come from the lips of her own son. This is not the place to analyse Croce's observation in greater detail. A rereading of the paragraph in question (*The Castle of Fratta*, p. 33) will, I believe, show that Croce was reading with a most Victorian mentality and that the modern reader—in this respect similar to the eighteenth-century one—feels no offense.

Early examination of Nievo's work, which focussed on Nievo, the acute observer, the humorist, the forerunner of naturalism and regionalism (L. Russo, *Ritratti e disegni storici*, "Historical Portraits and Sketches," 1953), was accompanied by two surprising misconceptions: first, that Nievo wrote simply to fill hours of enforced inactivity while awaiting the moment in which his *real* vocation could find expression; second, that he wrote *Le confessioni* in eight months of feverish work without once going back to correct or to revise. The exclamation, "Oh, what would he have accomplished had he lived!" was indeed most popular.

These anomalies are to be explained by the fact that only most recently has specific attention gone to Nievo, the writer. Only in the past few years has light been focussed on the man at his writing table and has some attempt been

made to study the genesis of his inspiration in terms of the imagination, rather than in terms of models he copied or of actual scenes, historical characters, and personal acquaintances that he incorporated into his work. The rereading of Nievo in this light points to a new interpretation to be set beside those already mentioned, but it has barely begun.

A most important step in the right direction was taken by Filippo Zampieri who, in treating problems related to the availability and publication of Nievo's correspondence ("Appunti sull'epistolario di Ippolito Nievo," *Belfagor*, VI, 1948), sets down the kind of questions which its careful examination might answer. For instance, what, how, and why did Nievo read? What themes and motifs of his literary production are adumbrated in his letters? Are there any indications that might lead to the formulation of Nievo's poetics? Is there evidence of concern with linguistic or stylistic problems? All questions, as is readily seen, of central interest in Nievo criticism. Zampieri attempts to give answers on the strength of the material examined by him and these are sufficient proof that further investigation in this area would indeed be rewarding. A rereading of Nievo's novels and short stories with the problem of literary creation in mind brings interesting corroborating material to Zampieri's conclusions. Nievo is often specific in his references to writers and artists and not infrequently does he reveal his attitude to what he is writing and to the craft of the writer in general. *Il conte pecoraio*, for instance, contains several pages in which the story of *I promessi sposi* is told by one simple country girl to another. The girl, in contrast to her companion, has learned to read but she lacks all literary sophistication and admires in "the greatest book of our century" (the words are Nievo's) what Renzo and Lucia might have admired, had they themselves not been the protagonists. The comments of the two young women are artless and quaint, but they tell in graphic terms that Nievo saw in *I promessi sposi* not so much the historical novel (in which sense it is always referred to as having influenced *Le confessioni*), as the idyllic tale, the "roman champêtre" in which virtue triumphs. *Orlando furioso* was also read and remembered by Nievo in this intimate, unheroic vein, and with a

gently mocking smile he thinks of an Ariosto tournament when he describes the fight between Giorgetto and Favitta, the two peasant children of *Il Varmo*. As a matter of fact, the manner in which the decaying feudal world of the Castle of Fratta is portrayed may have as much to do with a close and imaginative reading of Ariosto, as with meditations upon the downfall of the Venetian Republic, for while there are, in the latter connection, many echoes of *Angelo di bontà* in *Le confessioni*, there is an airiness and a happy humour about the whole recreation which is strongly reminiscent of Ariosto's own participant detachment.

While Zampieri suggests a methodology for studying Nievo, the writer, which will contribute to giving more than narrative or documentary meaning to episodes such as Don Gasparo's composition of an interminable poem for the nightly soporific delectation of the Inquisitor (*Angelo di bontà*), or to Count Rinaldo's struggles to see his life-long work on Venetian commerce in the Middle Ages progress through the various stages of publication, sale, and reception (*Le confessioni*), Ferdinando Giannessi and Umberto Bosco have formulated esthetic intuitions which serve to bring Nievo closer to us, readers of the twentieth century. Giannessi, in *Dizionario Letterario Bompiani degli Autori* ("Bompiani Literary Dictionary of Authors"), says of Nievo that he was too original a writer to be fully understood by his contemporaries, that the juxtaposition of his work and that of the historical novelists of his epoch (such as Rovani, whose *Cento anni*, "*One Hundred Years*," at one time vied with *Le confessioni* in the public's esteem) cannot give the clue to a spontaneity and a vitality so strong that they led Nievo to overcome the limitations of the literary conventions of his time and to become a forerunner of that integration of European (that is, non-provincial, non-Italian) cultural currents into Italian artistic experience which was to take place only in the present century. Giannessi calls Pisana "the newest, most irritating, and most pathetic character of Italian literature" and puts her into the same class with Proust's Albertine. In doing so, he accentuates the psychological aspects of *Le confessioni* and lends to Nievo a decidedly modern sensitivity. There is no question that the contem-

porary reader, accustomed to Freudian analysis, is struck by the exactness and radicalness of Nievo's observations on Pisana's early education and on the character traits which her childish actions reveal. Nievo almost apologizes for lingering on these details, but he cannot help feel that they are not "so childish as they seem to the common run of moralists." And while he may be more interested in the practical results which improved education can have on the national temper (this is a recurrent theme throughout his writing and we have noted his adherence to the nineteenth-century view of the social function of literature), we are likely to pass over these conclusions and marvel instead at the unexpected substitution of the "image of cautery that, once open, can no longer be closed," for the familiar metaphor which likens man to a "young and tender plant which bends or stands erect according to the skill of the cultivator." Experience and reflection have taught Nievo that the effect of reason, will power, and conscience are negligible in the correction of personality disturbances resulting from the premature and undisciplined awakening of the senses, that great passions are not equivalent to deep affections and that the experiences of childhood are crucial. "From the sort of life that they let her [Pisana] lead as a baby and as a young girl," he comments, "there emerge heroines, but never prudent and temperate women; not good mothers, not chaste wives nor true and patient friends; there emerge creatures who today would sacrifice their lives for a cause for which the next day they would not give a button. It is, more or less, the school wherein are tempered momentary and very great virtues and also great and lasting vices, the school of ballerinas, of singers, of actresses and of adventuresses."

Bosco in his review of Italian literature, written for the *Dizionario enciclopedico italiano*, also calls attention to Nievo's unusual psychological insights. To them he correctly attributes the greater part of Nievo's present popularity, the fact that he has in the long run won out over other novelists of his time. But it is not so much what might be called the clinical side of Nievo's observations that Bosco singles out (semi-scientific interest in psychological phenomena was, after all, as characteristic of the eighteenth as of the twentieth

century), as the general atmosphere in which they bathe. For without actually directly referring to dreams, Nievo has succeeded in creating around his characters and the world in which they move the distinctive feeling—at times precise, at others slightly out of focus—of the dream. Memory and dreams, the two non-voluntary activities in which the workings of the psyche can be seen at their purest, and which have informed a most significant number of the great novels of the first part of the twentieth century, are felt by Nievo to be closely connected. And it may well be that the fabulous, half-magic, distant world of Fratta is not merely the product of nostalgia (for what is past, for childhood), but of a more complicated stratification of the imagination. A clue for exploring this further is offered in *Angelo di bontà*. Here, through the amusing and at the same time lovable and pathetic character of Chirichillo, Nievo presents a theory of the transmigration of souls, which has so far escaped all attention. Chirichillo, shadow and factotum of the *podestà* of Asolo, claims to have positive proof of his former existences. This proof is given him by his memory, which being stronger and more vigorous in him than in other mortals, permits him to recall at least five former incarnations, although he does admit that details become paler as their distance in time increases.

It might be well, at this point, to recall a few dates. Nievo, who was born in 1831, writes a confession in the first person, imagining the narrator to be born in 1775. The confession ends in 1855, very shortly before Nievo began its actual writing. Exploratory work for writing *Le confessioni* had preceded not only incidentally, inasmuch as the short stories and early novels contain in embryo ideas and subjects that were to be enlarged upon later, but consciously as well. Nievo says explicitly in his preface to the 1856 edition of *Angelo di bontà*: "Hold out your hand, O reader, and help me in this dangerous leap which I have been thinking of and for which I have been gathering strength and endurance for a long time. For the present sketch of the past century seemed to me an excellent undertaking in preparation for a transition to the present century, with which I shall entertain you at another time, if God and your good

will, that is, stand me in good stead." *Angelo di bontà* is set in Venice, around 1750, and although the main action takes place in the city itself, much attention is given to an examination of conditions and events on the mainland (Fratia is in the vicinity of Udine), some pages being more nearly historical annotations than narrative proper. It is a commonplace in Nievo criticism to point out in Nievo's maternal grandfather, the Venetian patrician Carlo Marin, the figure on which Carlino was modelled. Carlo Marin, as a matter of fact, lived from 1775 to 1853 and becoming a functionary first in the service of Austria, then of France and then again of Austria, moved from one to the other of the more important cities of Lombardy-Venetia. As it was his experiences that to a large extent went to make up *Le confessioni*, so it was those of his own father and grandfather after which, in turn, *Angelo di bontà* was fashioned. Nievo is not reluctant to acknowledge as much, confident as he is that the value of his work is not impaired, but rather heightened, by its factual basis. But to family memories, relived by Nievo in the various stages of his work in almost chronological order, are added Nievo's own memories, and it is they that infuse life into the former. It is, in other words, impossible to effect a distant division between the author of *Le confessioni* and its protagonist. Their close connection, which was severely criticized by Croce as a constant interference between the two, has become familiar to us, readers of Proust, Svevo, and Joyce, and provides no more of a stumbling block to us than it did to Nievo himself.

For though we have tried to show that Nievo was more consciously a writer than early critics, who saw in him only the thwarted man of action anxiously waiting for the proper moment of self-expression, would have us believe, we must not forget that he was above all a spontaneous, almost an impulsive writer, not a cautious and reflective one. Toward the end of *Il Varmo* he says: "I have continued to go ahead, amusing myself with the sentences and chapters which I watched flowing from my pen like a child who passes his time blowing soap bubbles through a reed. And now I suddenly find that the tale is finished." It was his spontaneity, giving free rein to his imagination, which made possible the

recreation of moments of Venetian and Italian life so vivid that one might be tempted to believe that he too shared Chirichillo's gift of retrospective vision. But just as he did not end *Il Varmo* with the moral of the tale which an old-fashioned story teller would have appended, but tried instead to satisfy the expectations of "the spoiled readers of the present century" by accompanying his characters to the fitting and acceptable conclusion of marriage, so he could not avoid other literary practices of his time, nor could he write without carrying with him the whole cultural baggage which his education and the times in which he lived gave him. Nievo, the writer, will be fully understood only when the difficult, perhaps the impossible task of extricating the elements of tradition from those of his personal practice of art will be accomplished. It will then become apparent that *Le confessioni's* shortcomings, which we mentioned at the beginning of this essay, were not the result of hasty composition, but were unavoidable consequence of the channel into which Nievo's kind of intimate imagination was unconsciously forced by the models which he had before him. Before this is done many missing elements will have to be found. Nievo's life will have to be explored more fully than it has been up to now. More will have to be known about customs, historical events, important families in the many localities where Nievo lived for longer or shorter periods. Local periodicals of the time will have to be examined for evidence of prevalent fashions in writing. All that side of Nievo which is related not to national and nationalistic aspirations, but to memory, evocation, and analysis will have to be explored. For if it can be said that by and large Nievo criticism in the past hundred years has shown a swing away from emphasis on the word "Italian" to the word "Confessions" in the title, this trend has not yet brought its full results. Modern criticism, with its eclectic methods, its respect for history, taste, and esthetics all in one, seems especially well suited to study as complex and at the same time as uniform a work of art as Nievo's.



Leon Battista Alberti and Jan Van Eyck on the Origin of Painting

by

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For the last hundred-odd years, since the publication of Michelet's *Histoire de France*, one of the main characteristics of the Renaissance has been seen as the discovery of the world. Under the stimulus of literary and artistic remains from classical antiquity this discovery evolved as a revival of the interest in nature and man which the Greco-Roman culture had witnessed. From this point of view Italy was the foremost country in developing the new era and it was primarily by way of Italian influences that the Renaissance spread to the other European countries. In other words, the Renaissance is first and foremost an Italian phenomenon.

It is a logical consequence of this view that the Northern countries, including their most representative artistic area, Flanders, are considered to be still medieval in attitude when Italy is already far advanced in its "modern" explorations. The fifteenth century in the South is the Early Renaissance, dawn and morning of the modern age, whereas in the North it is the late and concluding phase of an earlier age, marked by the "waning of the Middle Ages" (Huizinga).

If modern scholarship has produced comparatively few ideas and evidences that could seriously challenge the dat-

ing of the Renaissance in Italy, it certainly has increased our knowledge of the fifteenth century in Flanders, to such an extent that a revision of its traditional interpretation has become mandatory. More and more, scholars are inclined to include it under the term "Northern Renaissance," even if those two words seem to imply a certain contradiction.

A rebirth of classical antiquity was possible in the South because the South was in direct descent from classical culture. The Italians are descendants of the Romans. Their country was the country of their illustrious forebears. Their land had been shaped and permanently marked by the deeds and monuments of their Latin ancestors. The Renaissance, so to speak, was a family affair. The ancestors of the Netherlandish people had never been fully a part of the Roman Empire, the great transmitter of the classical culture. If they had been in touch with it, it was primarily under the tensions of assault or defense, in attempts to fend off the Roman aggressor and to preserve their own, different cultural heritage. If, then, classical culture did not belong to their own tradition, if it was not at home in their own country, it could not be reborn there either. The term "Renaissance" has to be reinterpreted, or at least given additional meaning in order to allow for its application to the Northern fifteenth century as well as for its simultaneous application to South and North.

In this case, it is bound to lose a great deal of its original meaning, that of classical revival. That means that the Greco-Roman concern for the world was less a cause of the Renaissance than possibly a by-product or an effect, and we must of necessity look for evidence of a different kind as an indication of a changing attitude. If these evidences, whatever form they might have taken, appear in both areas and, furthermore, appear simultaneously, they can justifiably be used to characterize the Renaissance beyond the boundaries of Italy.



In 1434 at the latest, but probably already in 1428, Leon Battista Alberti entered for the first time in his life the city of his forefathers, Florence. Owing to political controversies, the Albertis had been expelled from Florence by the Albizzis for more than three decades. Leon Battista



Fig. 1. Masaccio, The Holy Trinity, Santa Maria Novella, Florence



Fig. 2. Jan van Eyck, Timotheos, London, National Gallery (Courtesy Nat'l Gallery)

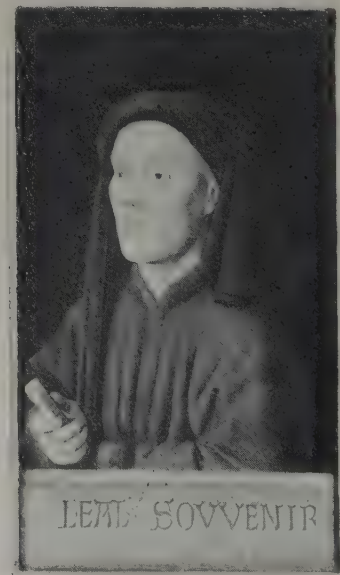


Fig. 3. Jan van Eyck, Man in a Red Turban (Selfportrait ?), London, National Gallery (Courtesy National Gallery)



Fig. 4. Jan van Eyck, The Arnolfini Double Portrait, London, National Gallery (Courtesy National Gallery)



Fig. 5. Jan van Eyck, Detail of the Arnolfini Double Portrait (Courtesy National Gallery)



Fig. 6. Marzia di Varone, Paris, Bib. Nat., ms. fr. 12420, fol. 101 v.

had been born in Genoa in 1404.¹ It is known that he lived and studied in the cities of Venice, Padua and Bologna before making his first visit to Florence.² His familiarity with Florentine artists of the time seems to indicate that he must have stayed for quite a while in his native town before his next recorded visit in 1434. It is known that in 1431 he accepted a position from the pope, which means he must have lived primarily in Rome. Possibly he accompanied Cardinal Albergati on a mission to France and to the Netherlands during the same year. But when he sat down in 1434/35 to write a Treatise on the art of painting he refers so vividly to his artistic experiences in Florence and the content of his Treatise is so thoroughly Florentine in character that a stay of considerable length must be assumed.

Alberti was struck by what he had seen in Florence. Even though he refers to only one specific monument, the cupola of the Florentine cathedral by his friend Filippo Brunelleschi, to whom he dedicates his Treatise, the names of artists mentioned in the introduction prove that he was familiar with the new creations in all artistic media: the sculptors Donatello, Ghiberti and Luca della Robbia, and the painter Masaccio. It is significant, not only as a possible preference on the part of Alberti, but much more for the new importance of painting, that his first Treatise is completely devoted to this medium. Only much later was he to write treatises on architecture and sculpture. This is the more revealing as Alberti was at this time by no means an artist. It is true, he talks about "us painters," he refers to certain illusionistic "demonstrations which were called miracles by my friends," and statements in others of his writings make it clear that he did try his hand at painting—as one might put it today — but he had had no training as a painter. By schooling and study Alberti was an intellectual who, at an early age, must have developed an interest in the arts which much later was to evoke from him distinguished creativity as a designing architect.

If his first concern was with painting, a concern so strong that he felt pressed to investigate the elements of this art by painstaking and time-consuming scrutiny, then this art must have provided him with important aesthetic ex-

periences, experiences, apparently, which the monuments in the other media, despite their recognized greatness, could not provide. In Genoa, Venice, Padua, and Bologna Alberti had seen paintings of the so-called International style, more often than not in a rather provincial version, that is to say, paintings, whether large or small in scale, of a highly decorative character which combined a number of realistic minutiae with a general broad, narrative quality. These paintings told stories as a writer tells stories, and the reader when reading them is perfectly aware that despite their possible charm of narration, despite their devout religious content, they are, as stories, far removed from his own experiences and from his own existence. By imagination and contemplation the reader or viewer might transpose himself into the realm of the story, but the story would never have the immediacy of an experienced reality.

The same kind of painting was visible in Florence. But side by side with it were a few paintings of a strikingly different character. And their differences were the more unsettling, the more shocking, as they were in some instances literally flanked by paintings of the earlier traditional style. In the church of Santa Maria Novella Alberti could see the large fresco of the Holy Trinity by Masaccio which interrupted the long even flow of fourteenth century frescos on its walls. The earlier paintings moved the spectator primarily in the lateral sense, following the direction of the narration. The new painting arrested this movement of the spectator by substituting for the lateral expanse of the narrative sequence the perpendicular coordinate of confrontation. The wall breaks open in front of the spectator, giving a free view into a chapel-like interior in which the hieratic figure of the crucified Christ appears. It is not the Golgotha of the historical Crucifixion nor is it the heavenly vision of the Holy Trinity as the presence of God the Father and of the Holy Ghost might imply. It is omnipresence of Christ's sacrifice in the sanctity of an architectural chapel which is pointed out to the viewer by St. Mary. (fig. 1)

This new kind of pictorial image presents the subject in the sense that it makes it literally present for the viewer. One of the main means for the achievement of this effect is;

of course, the new focal-point perspective which gives upon a two-dimensional surface the illusion of a three-dimensional space. In all probability this perspective had been invented some ten years earlier by the architect Brunelleschi³: the artist most concerned with the creation of measured space had found that by foreshortening the third of three spacial coordinates the illusion of the same kind of measured space could be created. Masaccio learned this new technique from the architect and applied it for the first time in his monumental paintings. Alberti, in his Treatise, made it the basic requirement and the foundation for the art of painting.

It is well enough known that perspective gives the illusion of spatial depth, the foreshortened third dimension receding into distance and thus opening a pictorial space. But, much more important, is the effect it gives of *projection* toward the viewer. Though the space recedes, the figures within the space seem to be propelled forward. This impression can easily be explained and verified by retracing the steps necessary for a construction of perspectival space. The painter assumes a definite viewpoint for his spectator. This point provides him with a measurable distance between viewer and painting and with a definite eye level which, within the painting, becomes the horizon line. By standing in front of the painting the viewer certainly gets the effect of a receding space, but this recession is strongly counteracted by the figures in the center of that space, because they block off any view into the distance which the spatial setting implies. They appear as visual obstacles, and the effect is all the stronger in being inserted into a receding space. They reach out, so to speak, to the spectator, forcing him to react to this active confrontation of a true *vis-à-vis*. By painting these figures in a new exacting likeness of human beings, by emphasizing their volume and structure, by using the actual light within the church which comes through the windows in the clerestory as the source for light and shade within the painting, the impact of the painting as a seeming physical reality becomes that of an actual presence.

Since the invention of focal point perspective our eyes have been trained by almost five hundred years of illusionistic painting to take for granted that painting imitates nature

and automatically to translate the two-dimensional picture into a three-dimensional space. Therefore, we cannot immediately understand and re-experience the revolutionary shock which the paintings by Masaccio gave to his contemporaries. We might come closer to the intensity of the original effect if we take as an example—though in reverse—the modern artistic revolution accomplished by Picasso during the first decade of this century when he created his first cubist paintings. In the midst of paintings which were based on the recognizability of subject matter—in whatever specific style it might be shown—there suddenly appeared paintings which conscientiously distorted and dissected the forms to such an extent that the subject became unrecognizable and, not many years later, was to disappear completely. If, in Picasso's case, the revolution was away from the natural form, in Masaccio's case it was in the reverse direction, toward consistency and accuracy in the reproduction of natural forms. And the quality of confrontation which resulted so emphatically in these new paintings of the Early Renaissance might give us a clue to the cause of this new tendency: the reality captured illusionistically in the pictorial image makes one apprehend the physical reality of nature. The confrontation of the viewer by the image leads to a realization of the concrete human situation, the relation between subject and object.

When Alberti undertakes to theorize about the art of painting he is not merely concerned with setting down the new principles and techniques he has observed in Masaccio's paintings. His main goal is to come to an understanding of these new art forms. The first of the three Books into which he divides his Treatise is dedicated entirely to the science of perspective and that means, as we have seen, the mathematical and geometrical foundation for creating confrontation. Alberti makes that clear not by stating first that perspective is a means to create illusionistic space, but by defining space only in relation to an object: "Since painting strives to represent things seen, let us note in what way things are seen. First, in seeing a thing, we say it occupies a place."⁴ Shortly after he writes: "The greatest work of the painter is the *istoria* (i.e. the depiction of meaningful stories). Bodies are part of the *istoria* . . ." At the beginning of

Book Three Alberti recapitulates his basic premise: "I say the function of the painter is this: to describe with lines and to tint with colour on whatever panel or wall is given him similar observed planes of any body so that at a certain distance and in a certain position from the centre they appear in relief and seem to have mass." In every instance the emphasis lies on the image of solids in space rather than the image of the void of space itself.

Even if his Treatise is primarily an exploration and demonstration of the means the painter has to learn and to apply in order to fulfill the new demands of his *métier*, Alberti also expresses himself on the function of the painter's creation, namely the painting itself. This function is not limited to the reproduction of natural forms, nor does it exhaust itself in the illustration of important events or stories—such statements will be made only in later centuries. For Alberti the function of painting is best expressed in what he believes to be the origin of painting. At the beginning of Book Two he gives, under the cloak of mythology, his views on its origin: "I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting. Since painting is already the flower of every art, the story of Narcissus is most to the point. What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?" As his next sentences prove, Alberti is familiar also with other stories told by the ancients about the origin of painting, but it is the Narcissus story which he singles out: "Narcissus was a Thespian, the son of the blue Nymph Leiriope, whom the river-god Cephissus had once encircled with the windings of his streams, and ravished. The seer Teiresias told Leiriope, the first person ever to consult him: 'Narcissus will live to a ripe old age, provided that he never knows himself'. . . At Donacon in Thespia he came upon a spring, clear as silver, and never yet disturbed by cattle, birds, wild beasts, or even by branches dropping off the trees that shaded it; and as he cast himself down, exhausted, on the grassy verge to slake his thirst, he fell in love with his reflection. At first he tried to embrace and kiss the beautiful boy who confronted him, but presently recognized himself,

and lay gazing enraptured into the pool, hour after hour. How could he endure both to possess and yet not to possess? Grief was destroying him . . .”⁵ While bending over the water, Narcissus confronts his own image. He recognizes himself in the image. He realizes his own beauty in the image. The self-revelation occurs in the confrontation with his reflected mirror image. Painting is a mirror held up to nature. In the transposition from tangible reality into purely reflected but seeming reality occurs the recognition of the self and of the world. Only the art of painting works with this complete transposition of a three-dimensional world by reducing it to a two-dimensional image. The art of sculpture retains the third dimension in the volume of the sculptural form. The art of architecture is non-representational. Because painting alone translates the third dimension into the foreshortening of the pure image, the revealing quality of the recreated image exists only in this art and it is for this reason that painting is the first and foremost art of the Renaissance. Alberti stresses this new position: “Who can doubt that painting is the master art . . . ? The architect, if I am not mistaken, takes from the painter architraves, bases, capitals, columns, facades and other similar things”—an absurd statement which makes sense only in terms of Alberti’s desire to justify the predominance of painting.

In Italy Alberti is the first to state with such clarity the new function of painting. In his theoretical attitude he is a typical phenomenon of the Italian Renaissance. The initial experience, however, the awareness of confrontation, is, to my mind, not unique with Italy; outside Italy it merely found different expression. Moving somewhat forward in the fifteenth century, we find it used as a practical basis and as a demonstration for a religious contemplative attitude.

In December 1453 Cardinal Nicolas Cusanus, the great theologian and church reformer, sent to the monks of the Benedictine Abbey Tegernsee his book *De Visione Dei* (“On the Vision of God”), which he had written at their request and which he dedicated to them. This book, to quote Evelyn Underhill, “was written for the purpose of initiating them into that mystical experience which they had so eagerly discussed from outside. In a letter to the Community, which

fortunately survives, Nicholas says that he is sending to the abbey a picture and a little book; which will together introduce his pupils into the veritable practice of Mystical Theology—in other words, will teach them to realize the Presence of God. Thus, in reading the *Vision* we should ever have in mind the picture which is described in the Preface; that ‘icon’, or image of the Omnivoyant, on which the whole treatise is really a commentary.”⁶ A portion of this Preface reads as follows: “If I strive in human fashion to transport you to things divine, I must needs use a comparison of some kind. Now among men’s work I have found no image better suited to our purpose than that of an image which is omnivoyant—its face, by the painter’s cunning art, being made to appear as though looking on all around it. There are many excellent pictures of such faces—for example, that of the archeress in the market place of Nuremberg; that by the eminent painter, Roger, in his priceless picture in the governor’s house at Brussels; the Veronica in my chapel at Coblenz, and, in the castle of Brixen, the angel holding the arms of the Church, and many others elsewhere. Yet, lest ye should fail in the exercise, which requireth a figure of this description to be looked upon, I send for your indulgence such a picture as I have been able to procure, setting forth the figure of an omnivoyant, and this I call the icon of God.

“This picture, brethren, ye shall set up in some place, let us say on a north wall, and shall stand around it, a little way off, and look upon it. And each of you shall find that, from whatsoever quarter he regardeth it, it looketh upon him as if it looked on none other.” For two more pages Cusanus continues to describe this situation. He has the monks change their position in front of the icon: from whatever angle they look at the painting, they: “will come to know that the picture’s face keepeth in sight all as they go on their way . . . ’Tis by means of this perceptible image that I purpose to uplift you . . . by a certain devotional exercise, unto mystical Theology.”⁷ As Erwin Panofsky remarks, “after an established custom of medieval scholasticism, Cusanus endeavored to carry the mind of his readers to that which is divine by means of a *similitudo* taken from human activity.”⁸ But it is a *similitudo* laden with the immediacy of a new exper-

ience. The concreteness of the constant confrontation which in the icon is, of course, based on the flatness of the image, leads to the realization of the omnipresence of God. Cusanus received the idea for this exercise, among others, from the self portrait of Roger van der Weyden in his Justice panels which are now lost, but are known from a free copy in tapestry in Berne's Historisches Museum. In the painting this portrait apparently was the only face that looked out directly at the viewer, thus establishing a personal contact. When Roger inserted his own features in the painting, he had to draw them by looking into a mirror; he confronted himself.

The panel with Roger's portrait was unveiled at the Town Hall in Brussels in 1439 and it was here, in a public building, that Cusanus saw it. But Roger was not the first artist of the North who "documented" this new subject-object constellation. The man who had "invented" it and with whose work Roger was deeply familiar was Jan van Eyck. The reason that Cusanus does not mention him might lie in the fact that the two panels by Jan van Eyck which made use of the new motif probably belonged at the time to private collections. One of the two paintings, and pictorially the more striking one, is the portrait of a Man in a Red Turban in the National Gallery in London (fig. 2). The bust of the sitter is slightly turned to the left. So is his head; but in relation to the bust the face is turned somewhat more to the front. The eyes are turned completely to the front. "The glance of the sitter is turned out of the picture and sharply focused upon the beholder . . . For the first time the sitter seeks to establish direct contact with the spectator, and since the artist showed him *en buste*, omitting the hands, nothing detracts from the magnetism of the face. We feel observed and scrutinized by a wakeful intelligence."⁹ This "look out of the picture" is all the more striking because bust and head are not turned in the same direction, neither pure three-quarter profile nor pure frontality. In the three steps of turning, from bust to head to eyes, the sitter moves for the sake of establishing the most direct contact of confrontation.

This "great discovery in portraiture"¹⁰ occurred in 1433 as we know from Jan van Eyck's inscription on the original frame of the painting which gives the exact date of its

completion, October 21. Almost exactly one year before, on October 10, 1432, as the painted inscription records, Jan van Eyck finished the portrait of Timotheos, also in the National Gallery in London (fig. 3). The sitter, tentatively identified by Panofsky as the Burgundian court musician Gilles Binchois¹¹, here too is shown in three-quarter profile, but bust, head and eyes rigidly face in the same direction, avoiding direct contact with the spectator. In this earliest preserved instance of Jan van Eyck's individual portraits¹², the painter applies to the secular portrait that scheme of a three-quarter profile which was common at the time for the depiction of donors in devotional altars, as, for example, the patrons of Jan van Eyck's Ghent Altar, whose features he painted probably late in 1431 or early in 1432. The donor is meant to turn toward the center of the altar; therefore, he does not look upon the spectator. A confrontation between donor and viewer would disrupt the devotional unity of the religious painting. They only meet in the common purpose of the altar, in the shared devotion for the saintly image.

In the secular portrait they can meet eye to eye because the individual likeness is painted purely for the sake of being seen and recognized by the viewer. The sitter can literally come around to face us as does the Man in the Red Turban. Indeed, to record such a confrontation pictorially was a great discovery. To make this discovery possible a new experience was required. In the *vis-à-vis* between sitter and viewer none of the earlier reasons for the portrayal of an effigy remained valid: dynastic, donor, dedication or devotional portraiture. The recognition of the sitter as an individual *per se* is based on the recognition of the viewer as an individual *per se*, and most probably this recognition occurred in the mirror image of an artist's self-portrait. In the middle of the seventeenth century the Man in the Red Turban was for the first time called a self-portrait of Jan van Eyck, and recently Panofsky and Meiss both reasserted with new circumstantial evidence this identification. "It is more natural to assume that that important innovation, the 'look out of the picture,' first suggested itself to a painter observing his own face in a mirror than to a painter facing another person."¹³

Jan van Eyck, then, performs in 1433 that act *de facto*

which Alberti, almost at exactly the same time, claims *in theoria* as the origin of the art of painting. And if Alberti deduces this origin from the seeming reality of Masaccio's paintings, Jan van Eyck also displays that specific characteristic which Alberti admired in Masaccio: the figure projecting toward the viewer rather than receding into the depth of the pictorial space. Even if Jan van Eyck's London portrait, in spite of all the evidence that leads in that direction, should not be a self-portrait, it is known that he did make use of this self-confrontation one year later in the Marriage Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami in the National Gallery in London (fig. 4). In the bull's-eye mirror in the center of the painting appear two figures (fig. 5). Within the context of the painting which Panofsky has deciphered for us¹⁴, these two figures play the roles of witnesses to the marriage, and one of them, as stated by the inscription above the mirror—"Joannes de eyck fuit hic. 1434" (Jan van Eyck was here)—certainly must represent the painter.

In the case of this Arnolfini portrait the function of the mirror image undoubtedly is to record a presence, and this function is achieved in the duplicity of confrontation: the painter, while confronting bride and bridegroom is also confronting himself in the mirror. The simultaneity of the double confrontation is reflected in the mirror image.

It is true that we have an even earlier pictorial record of a painter painting his own portrait. As a gift for New Year's Day 1403 Philip the Bold received a French translation of Boccaccio's *Liber de claris mulieribus* which had been illuminated the year before by an anonymous French artist, the Master of 1402 (Paris, Bibl. Nat., Fr. 12420).¹⁵ One of the famous women about whom Boccaccio talks is a certain Marzia di Varone who, in ancient times, had lived in Rome. She was famous not only because of her moral purity, but also as an artisan and painter. "For a long time there existed examples of her art, among other things especially her self-portrait which she had painted with the help of a mirror so accurately with outlines and colors on a plane, preserving the aspect of the face, that it appeared to be really she to everyone in turn."¹⁶ The miniaturist shows Marzia seated at her working desk (fol. 101 v.; fig. 6). The

painting is propped at an angle against a support. Marzia is painting her features while holding in her left hand a small oval mirror in which the reflection of her face is clearly visible. It might seem that the Master of 1402 anticipated by some thirty years the experience of Jan van Eyck. But there is one great difference between the miniature and the two paintings by Jan van Eyck: the miniaturist gives an illustration of an artist painting a self-portrait; Jan van Eyck performs the action. Furthermore, the miniaturist illustrates a given text which explicitly mentions the mirror as necessary for a self-portrait and the text narrates the story of a painteress who had lived in the far-away time of pagan Rome. The difference is that between the fairy tale of Alice in Wonderland and an actuality. The miniaturist is not concerned with the recording of any real likeness. His pictorial forms do not yet have the function of being the mirror of nature.

It is this new function which distinguishes Jan van Eyck's paintings. It might well be that he was familiar with the Boccaccio of Philip the Bold, which most probably passed on into the collection of his grandson, Philip the Good, to whom Jan was court painter. The work of the Master of 1402 was influential on succeeding masters and this implies that his work must have been accessible to them. But then if Jan might have received the initial stimulus from the illumination, his use of mirrors presupposes a new stylistic as well as human situation, a situation which, even if brought about in a different way, must in its results have been very similar to that in contemporaneous Italy.

The North did not invent focal point perspective so early as the second decade of the fifteenth century, as did Italy. As a matter of fact, the first extant Flemish painting constructed with consistent perspective is dated as late as 1452—a "lag in progressive achievement" often used as evidence for a retarded, still medieval attitude in the North. The North at that time did not have a theory of artistic vision which, for the South, was the prerequisite for the invention and use of perspective. The North, in contrast to Italy, is characterized by the absence of a theoretical attitude. The Northern attitude is practical and experimental. The results appear in its paintings in the tremendous concern for the

concreteness and particularity of pictorial forms, which, since the 90's of the fourteenth century, made itself known in the most astonishingly rapid rise of a naturalistic style. This development is not that of a learning process in which the painters gradually acquire the necessary ability to reproduce natural forms. The mastering of the technical skill is merely the corollary to a spiritual process: "Towards the end of the Middle Ages two factors dominate religious life: the extreme saturation of the religious atmosphere, and a marked tendency of thought to embody itself in images. Individual and social life, in all their manifestations, are imbued with the conceptions of faith. There is not an object nor an action, however trivial, that is not constantly correlated with Christ or salvation. All thinking tends to religious interpretation of individual things; there is an enormous unfolding of religion in daily life. . . The spirit of the Middle Ages, still plastic and naive, longs to give concrete shape to every conception. Every thought seeks expression in an image. . ." ¹⁷

This tendency of the "religious thought to crystallize into images" (Huizinga) means, if seen from the side of the artist, that his naturalistic forms are "symbols in disguise" (Panofsky). While painting the "realities of nature and history" he really is painting "symbols or emblems of salvation" ¹⁸, for, although he paints nature naturalistically, the natural form does not refer to a physical reality, but serves as an image of a metaphysical reality. The image, though clothed in a new form, is the typical medieval *speculum* which does not reflect anything of this world but reflects only the transcendental world.

Because of this symbolical function of the image, it is also understandable that the Northern painter is more concerned with the depiction of objects as individual particular things than with the spatial context in which they appear. It is not the relation of object to object that counts but the relation of the object to its metaphysical content. Spatial illusionism, therefore, is of secondary importance and this might explain the later date for the "invention" of focal-point perspective in the North. This mathematical means for illusionism could enter the focus of interest only after the function of the pictorial image had changed.

The new guise of naturalism not only disguised the symbol but also provided the necessary impetus for this new function. By substituting a mirror for the medieval *speculum*, Jan van Eyck saw a new reality, one without metaphysical content. When confronting himself in the mirror he no longer saw a symbol of something beyond, he saw himself; and, as the Arnolfini Double Portrait proves, while painting his presence he recognized the quality of being and existence in man and nature. In the two paintings discussed, documented for 1433-34, Jan van Eyck repeats the same experience which Narcissus had undergone in the mythological past and which Alberti was reviving simultaneously as the ancestral form for the origin of the art of painting. Whatever the specific form or medium of expression, the same experience, that of confrontation, occurred at the same time in the North as well as the South and this simultaneity is more revealing for a changed cultural climate, for the beginning of a new attitude, in short for the Renaissance than the presence or absence of classical antiquity.

NOTES

- (1) C. Ceschi, "La Madre di Leon Battista Alberti," *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1948, pp. 191 ff.
- (2) The best biography of Alberti is still Girolamo Mancini, *Vita di Leon Battista Alberti*, 2nd edition, Florence, 1911.
- (3) The Trinity fresco has recently been redated from early 1427 to before November 1425; cf. note 19 in Howard Saalman, "Filippo Brunelleschi: Capital Studies," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. XL, 1958, p. 117.
- (4) This and the following quotations from Alberti's Treatise are quoted from the edition by John R. Spencer, *Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting*, New Haven, 1956.
- (5) Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. I, New York, 1957, pp. 286 ff.
- (6) Evelyn Underhill, in the Introduction to *Nicholas of Cusa, The Vision of God*, translated by Emma G. Salter, London, 1928, pp. xi ff.
- (7) *ibid.*, pp. 3 ff.
- (8) Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Cambridge, 1953, p. 248.
- (9) *ibid.*, p. 198.

- (10) *ibid.*
- (11) Erwin Panofsky, "Who is Jan van Eyck's 'Tymotheos'?", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. XII, 1949, pp. 80 ff.
- (12) cf. Millard Meiss, "'Nicholas Albergati' and the Chronology of Jan van Eyck's Portraits," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 94, 1952, pp. 137 ff.
- (13) E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, p. 198 and note 1983.
- (14) E. Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 66, 1934, pp. 117 ff.
- (15) Bella Martens, *Meister Francke*, Hamburg. 1929. pp. 192 ff.
- (16) Giacomo Manzoni, *Delle donne famose di Giovanni Boccaccio*, traduzione di M. Donato degli Albazani di Casentino, 3rd ed., Bologna, 1881, pp. 202-203.
- (17) J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, New York, 1949, p. 136.
- (18) *ibid.*, p. 141.



TRENDS



LITERARY CRITICISM IN THE UNIVERSITIES

In their brief preface to the two miscellaneous volumes they published eight years ago for Benedetto Croce's eightieth birthday, the editors, Carlo Antoni and Raffaele Mattioli, presented the works of the Neapolitan philosopher as the center of all cultural activity in Italy in the past fifty years. Assuming such an historical perspective to be correct, and I believe that essentially it is, studying Croce's times means examining not only the works of Croce, but also that network of discussions and debates that grew up around him over the years. The works of Croce, the irradiation of his thought, is relatively easy to trace and has already been studied in its essentials. But it is perhaps even more important to examine the history of this relationship between Croce and his times. His thought was under constant pressure from, and was influenced by, this culture which he himself had in such large measure helped to create. And through their discussions of him and their literary dialogue with him, those who wrote about him helped fashion a movement that is more than Croce's work alone: it is a composite of all these elements and their interrelationships. Assuming (limited as such a point of view is) that Croce's most important and universal work is to be found in his studies of esthetics and literary theory, one must examine along with the work of Croce himself in this domain, the writings of Flora and Russo, for example. More than any others, they have helped to interpret Croce's orthodoxy as a freer complex of thought and doctrine, capable of taking its place in the multiple developments of contemporary culture. In line with this most valid interpretation of Croce, there is also now an intelligent, anti-dogmatic critic, Mario Fubini, who has col-

lected in a lucid, vigorous book (*Critica e poesia*, Bari, Laterza, 1956) a series of essays on literary theory, already published in part in various reviews both before and after Croce's death. This book does not actually contain a critical essay on Croce such as Russo wrote in his *La critica letteraria contemporanea*, but it does contain an intense participation in a certain cultural atmosphere, a tone and color of thought, that are unquestionably Croce's. It may be interesting to the non-Italian reader to note how a mode of thought such as Croce's, which the scholars of esthetics have a tendency to systematize into a closed, historically limited form, continues as a living tradition, always open to ever new and more complex aspects of cultural civilization. What Cassirer and Wellek, for example, have written with such authority on the paralysis of Croce's esthetics, is certainly well known. "In his theory," Cassirer writes, "the whole spiritual energy is contained and extended in the formation of the intuition alone. When this process is completed the artistic creation has been achieved." (*An Essay on Man*, Anchor Book, pp. 181-2). Now for Fubini, if it is true that Croce opposed every endeavor on the part of criticism to distinguish between "style and form, form and content, word and soul, expression and intuition," and gave the material a solely technical importance void of significance with regard to the essence of intuition, it is also true that the Neapolitan philosopher in his practice of criticism did not confine himself to distinguishing poetry from non-poetry. In his judgments on the Renaissance, on Arcadia, etc., he took into account, through the concept of literature, the external reproduction necessary for the communication of intuition. As a corollary and support of this mental attitude that tends to present us with Croce the unprejudiced reader of criticism and poetry, Fubini reminds us of a page Croce wrote as preface to the book of Cesare de Lollis on Italian poetic form in the nineteenth century, where precisely the eternally contemporary intuition of poetry does not exclude a definition of poetry as a chorus that proceeds through the centuries, in which each human voice listens to and absorbs into itself those preceding. And he also cites a passage from Croce's last book, *Discorsi di varia filosofia*, in which he makes apparent the legitimate possibility of innumerable ways of approaching

the work of art. It is a question then for Fubini not of stressing insoluble contradictions in Croce's thought, but of following this thought in its dynamic development, explaining, when need be, Croce with Croce, or even using Croce against Croce. It is not a distorted image of Croce that results from this process, however. What there is, is a certain conscious jump in the theory that indicates the point at which the discourse changes from the objective to the more personal, at which Fubini, speaking of Croce, means to speak of himself, and even in doing so, his words echo that familiar mode of thought to which he is so close spiritually, even when differing in substance. One could say that Fubini's style of criticism is filled with a romantic experience close to Vico's of the poetic nature of language, accompanied and corrected by a taste for precise and simple means of expression. It differs from that of Croce in its preoccupation with the extension of the poetic sphere beyond the limits of a dialectic between poetry and non-poetry. According to Fubini, the sharp distinction between these two concepts of poetry and non-poetry, cannot be applied to a consideration of the work of poetry, since there exist works in which the necessary contrast between poetry and non-poetry is resolved in a composite form of poetry and oratory which he calls fragmentary poetry. For example, in some of Alfieri's tragedies, he says, there are scenes and characters that do not compose harmonious wholes, but rather give an impression of incompleteness, which does not, however, prevent the poetry, smothered though not completely suffocated by the passions, from manifesting itself. And in discussing the concept of literature, which for Croce is a practical activity and a product of civilization, Fubini insists on its disinterested nature; because, if the harmony of discourse also predominates there, where its aim is other than poetic, then this is a sign of the immanence of poetry in all life around us. We then have, in a way, three different manifestations of interest to the artistic experience: "poetry," in which the passions and emotions, risen to the harmonious sphere of intuition, become transformed into clear, pure expression; "fragmentary poetry," in which the poetic flow is arrested by the too lively presence of the passions which throw a retrospective shadow on the more successful moments of the poetry itself;

and "literature," which is the esthetic experience manifested through coherent and harmonious forms in a discourse whose aim is different from the aim of poetry. Fubini is a militant literary critic before being a theorist of art, and these divisions demonstrate, more than any great rigor in theory, a preoccupation with and an always greater adherence to the various manifestations of the poetic language. By this method, Fubini arrives at the necessity of a separation between form and content in the practical daily exercise of criticism, and at the conclusion that criticism of form and criticism of content are empiric aspects of one criticism which approaches the work of art as a whole. But rather than inferior aspects of criticism, they are ways in which this criticism reveals itself. The beauty of the work of art is inexhaustible, and one can speak of it in different ways without ever giving, once and for all, the verbal equivalent of the emotion it provokes.

Whereas Fubini sought to bring all the various endeavors of Italian literary criticism in recent years into the intellectual framework of De Sanctis or Croce, others have wished to achieve their own place as theorists, starting from a precise well-determined experience of literary technique. Caretti, a pupil of Barbi and Pasquali, in this manner has, by means of a detailed examination of the edition of texts, stressed the ties that exist between philology and criticism. The point of differentiation between the two disciplines, he maintains (in *Filologia e critica*, Napoli, 1955), takes place in the moment in which the editor, after having separated the genuine text from the contaminations of tradition and having relegated the latter to the footnotes, finds himself before the real variants of the author himself, which represent the diverse moments of the poetry in its making. At this moment he must make a choice between various possibilities, create his own point of view of the right poetry, make himself a critic of his author. If the study of the "synchronic" apparatus, as Caretti calls it (using an expression from the linguistics of de Saussure), which aims at separating the text from the additions and corrections that are foreign to it, requires only technical ability, that of the "diachronic" apparatus requires a critical choice and an uncommon esthetic

sensibility. But whatever the success of Caretti's terminology, (it has been used, among others, by the Spanish-language critic, Claudio Guillén, who applied it, though in a different way, to comparative literature); it remains an indication of the profound development of that philology, so indicative of Italian criticism in recent years, that is not self-contained but is preoccupied with a definition of the work of art.

It is not our place to speak here of the studies made by Gianfranco Contini of "Petrarca volgare" or the *Rime* of Dante, since they fall outside the chronological limits set for this essay. But it is important to note how this critic's authoritative work of restoration in bringing Dante's stylistic research before contemporary Italian esthetic sensibility, has been extended to other zones by other scholars. I am thinking, in particular, of an anthology, edited by Mario Marti, *Poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (Rizzoli, Milano, 1956), which is the natural follow-up of a study by the same author, *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (Pisa, 1953). Marti analyzes a group of poets, among whom is rightly included the Dante of the *Tenzzone con Forese*, not in order to extract any romanticism from their bizarre personalities, but to individuate a literary tradition which is opposed to chivalric court poetry, but which is rendered acceptable throughout the whole Romance world by the *ars dictandi* and the various treatises on medieval rhetoric.

In a remarkable chapter in his noteworthy *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Vol. I, Cap. IV, Sansoni, 1956), Luigi Russo demonstrates an analogous desire to individuate a middle style in pre-Dantesque literature and the literature of Dante's times. This "comic-realistic" literature is studied by both as a dimension in language which, along with the *dolce stile* and the *rime pietrose*, converge in the experience of the Divine Comedy. Russo, though, true to his own nature as a historian of morals, underscores the tormented religious feeling of this poetry and the crisis in the Platonic imagination of the medieval man that it announces. At any rate, the whole of Russo's literary history, up to and including the chapter on Dante, moves along a shrewd and up-to-date line in the study of philological problems, that is more closely linked to the example of Barbi and the most recent research

in Romance philology than it is to De Sanctis or Croce. It is important to note how Russo accepts the stylistic and linguistic importance Contini gives the *Rime*, though with some hesitation about the *rime pietrose* where he effects a partial return to a biographic interpretation. In general, he agrees that this approach is the only way of gaining a deeper understanding of the various stratifications of Dante's poetry in their aspect of voluntary technique limited to particular periods of the author's life.

Numerous Catholic scholars have also made intrepid use of philology, both as a literary and as an historical-biographic technique, in an effort to reconsider some of the more salient propositions of De Sanctis and Croce in a light more favorable to the Catholic ideological upbringing. The research of Toffanin on humanism, and the critical-philological restorations of Billanovich, are both worthy of note, but we wish to concern ourselves briefly here with the book of Vittore Branca: *Boccaccio medievale* (Sansoni, 1956). It must be said, first of all, that there is one splendid chapter in this book, the third, in which the historical-philological documentation and the critical reasoning adhere perfectly. Using the historical studies of Saponi and Renouard, which validly fought the thesis of Sombart minimizing the importance of the merchant class, and exalted the function of Italian merchants in European history in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Branca analyzes what he calls the epic of the merchants in the *Decameron*. First, he notes the existence of a psychological transition from Dante, who made clear his scorn of the merchant "*che cambia e merca*," to Boccaccio, son of a merchant and merchant himself; and then he describes the merchant society as the natural reading public of the *Decameron*. He then goes on to an analysis of the stories concerning the merchant class, pointing out that along with Boccaccio's enthusiasm for the merchant's common-sense wisdom and spirit of adventure, there exists what amounts to a sort of religious horror at the cruelty of the merchant's aims and his means of attaining them, a horror of Ciappelletto, for example, who would be the counterpart of the wise merchant. This interpretation of the story of Ciappelletto as one written in a tragic key, indicates Branca's

disagreement with the traditional criticism of Boccaccio, but this dissension is still more accentuated in the reading of the *Decameron* that he suggests, based as it is on the edition of the *Decameron* that he himself published some time ago. Branca does believe in the rhythmic nature of the prose of the *Decameron*, but not in the same sense that enabled Flora to find hendecasyllables in the prose of Benvenuto Cellini. He reads and thus analyzes the *Decameron*, applying that mysticism of rhetoric which he sees Boccaccio as having in common with the whole Middle Ages and which translates itself into a use of the *cursus* and an obedience to the laws of the *ars dictandi*. The stories of the *Decameron* themselves become, according to Branca, a sort of moral itinerary which is developed within the complex of the narrative plan. It is not the framework that is absorbed by the mobility of the stories, but rather the stories which follow the moral itinerary set forth in the framework, with a sure medieval consciousness of cause. The stories, hence, are of an exemplary nature, and the *Decameron* a coherent, unified work, in which the moralizing trends of exemplary literature and the bourgeois anecdote, having moved until now in entirely different directions, finally meet. Branca's thesis is evident from the title of the book itself: *Boccaccio medievale*. His portrait of Boccaccio is one that presents him as a man entirely of his times. For a view of Boccaccio that loosens those ties with his times and sees in the quick, shrewd, narrative intelligence of the *Decameron* the signs of an imminent humanism, one must turn to the new edition of Luigi Russo's *Lettura del Decameron*, and the ninth chapter of his *Storia letteraria*. Whatever Boccaccio's intentions might have been, what matters for Russo is what Boccaccio really did. Studying the chapter on the plague, he doesn't find in it the traces of a solemn and thoughtful gravity, but rather a taste for the historical experience of life, the desire to see his stories be born in this world and of this world. The framework of the *Decameron* represents Boccaccio's effort to pay final homage to the Middle Ages, but this architectural construction becomes a decorative and hedonistic commentary on his storytelling.

In 1957 there appeared, along with two books by L. Baldacci on the lyrics of the sixteenth century, and one by

Franco Croce on the *Aristodemo* of Carlo dei Dottori, two books by Fredi Chiappelli, one of criticism on the epic Tasso and one an edition of *Gerusalemme*. It was not possible to consult the books of Chiappelli, but this essay cannot be concluded without recalling the loving care the Florentine scholar has already dedicated to Tasso. Among others, there is the brilliant essay that appeared in the review *Trivium* in Zurich, dedicated to a study of the language of Tasso, in which Tasso's literary sensibility, his pre-baroque accents, are acutely illuminated in an intense analysis of style. Chiappelli, who is also a scholar of linguistics, has turned his attention to many diverse aspects of the Italian literary language: to Sannazaro, Machiavelli, and contemporary prose and poetry. Baldacci and Franco Croce turn their attention to aspects of Italian literature previously little and badly studied, and for this reason their books represent indispensable working tools. In his book, *Lirici del cinquecento* (Firenze, Salani, 1957), Baldacci proposes a re-reading of the sixteenth century lyrics that is philologically meticulous and outside the system of any preconceived school. He stresses Bembo and his letter "De Imitatione" in order to individuate a current prevalent in sixteenth-century poetry. But contrary to the negative interpretation, held also by Benedetto Croce, that sees in Bembo a good theorist but a bad poet, he stresses the importance of this poetry that considers Petrarch's *Canzoniere* a document of exemplary life to be imitated, as well as a poetic text. This line of reasoning enables him to include both strong, individualistic poets like Galeazzo di Tarsia and delicate suffering poets like Coppetta, in Bembism, and to trace with more precision the lines of demarcation and the limits of anti-Bembism in sixteenth-century poetry. He sees anti-Bembism as made up on the one hand of an autobiographic literature, exemplified by Gaspara Stampa, and on the other of the work of Casa. Casa began his literary apprenticeship under Bembo's guide, but withdrew from his influence after a deeply felt personal disappointment, which translated itself into a literature of confession. It is interesting to note Baldacci's devaluation of the poetry of Michelangelo, and his reduction to modest, but entirely plausible terms, of sixteenth-century feminine poetry. He makes a noteworthy exception for the poet Chiara

Matraini, who is a discovery of Baldacci's, and really seems to be worthy of attention.

Franco Croce's book, *Carlo De' Dottori* (Florence, 1957), is on the contrary of a frankly monographic nature. But it is a monograph *sui generis*, since in it are reviewed and condensed in rapid sketches all the humanity and culture of the Italian literary Baroque. It is the story of a strong and important personality, Dottori, in his relationship with the various cultural trends of his century. This work follows all of Dottori's writings, from the youthful *Alfenore*, to the various lyric poems, the *Parnaso*, the major work, *Aristodemo*, and the *Confessioni*. The currents of polemic and satiric inspiration are accurately examined, individuated, and separated from other literary examples, such as the famous one of the *Secchia Rapita* by Tassoni. The culminating chapter is dedicated to the tragedy *Aristodemo*, in which the grand, baroque gesture of the characters renders the fundamental bravura of the writer's soul, at the same time heralding the emotional crisis which will culminate in the senile withdrawal of the *Confessions*.

With the book by Franco Croce we can close this review of Italian criticism in recent years. Incomplete as this review may be, it can nevertheless give an idea of the complex and articulate picture of an extremely busy cultural activity to be found in Italian criticism today. From an ambitious and rich book of literary theory by a critic in the full development of his personality, we have come to the first work of a scholar who has absorbed with absolute discretion, but with methodological vigor, the teachings of the major critics; and in this continuity of work we can perceive the signs of the vigor and validity of a whole literary civilization.

DANTE DELLA TERZA



BOOKS



ORGANIZED LABOR

In March of this year the Communist-dominated union, Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL), won important shop-steward elections at the Lancia auto plant, Italcable, Alitalia, and Edison-volta. These victories were unexpected in view of two facts: beginning in 1955 the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CSIL), the Christian Democratic organization, had made great progress in attracting workers to its banner, and the Hungarian Revolution had weakened the Italian Communist party. Still a different kind of shock came in early April in the Fiat internal-committee election. At Fiat a brand-new union carried the balloting and at the same time the CGIL increased its voting strength from 21 to 25 per cent. This new union, the Democratic Free Workers, is an offshoot of CSIL. Led by Deputy Giuseppe Rapelli, a Christian Democrat, it now plans to establish itself on the national level. The loser on the current Italian labor scene has been the Christian Democratic union, CSIL.

Neither of these two 1958 developments — the resurgence of the Communist union nor the emergence of a splinter Christian Democratic union — was predicted by Joseph LaPalombara in his book, *The Italian Labor Movement: Problems and Prospects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957). Yet LaPalombara's explanation of organized labor in post-war Italy contains so many warning signals that the 1958 happenings come as no surprise to the reader. Indeed, this book provides much data for an understanding of these recent events.

Prof. LaPalombara's study describes and analyzes the evolution of free trade unions in modern Italy and diagnoses the troubles of the labor movement. On-the-spot investigations and interviews have enabled the author to penetrate beneath the formal structures of the unions, to see behind their official pronouncements and statistics. All too modestly LaPalombara indicates his primary aim is to give the American reader an informational framework within which more restricted research can be undertaken into Italy's labor movement. Actually he has done much more than this. He has produced a first-rate picture of trade union operations in a country where the labor movement is enmeshed in the struggle between

communism and democracy. One of LaPalombara's conclusions is that the future of Italy's democratic institutions may well depend upon the ability of non-communist unions to extend even further the political influence they exert. While these free unions have established a strong foothold in Italy — checking the communists so that they can no longer paralyze the economy — a decade of progress has failed to reduce substantially the membership strength of the CGIL. The weaknesses of the anti-communist unions are explored in a final chapter which, among other things, lays some of the blame on the policies and activities of the U. S. Government and on American trade unionists who have been influential in Italy. Patterning its objectives after American labor, says LaPalombara, may be a basic flaw in the CSIL since the Italian economic environment is hardly comparable. Italy is a poor country and management retains a pre-industrial antagonism toward organized labor.

Dr. LaPalombara has accomplished a well-nigh impossible task: he has produced a study so skilfully executed and so nicely written as to satisfy the layman and the academician alike. In no sense of the word is this a narrow monograph, despite its title. LaPalombara has placed the labor story in the context of Italian politics and the social structure. Thus, any reader will be richly rewarded by this sympathetic yet critical record of contemporary Italy. The author's keen insight, his balanced judgment, his ability to write readable prose — these make for an excellent little volume. Your reviewer liked particularly two apt word-pictures. To point up the difficulty of fusing Socialists, Catholics, and Republicans into one vast union, LaPalombara writes: "The views of Marx, Leo XIII, and Garibaldi are not so easily reconciled." On the difference between wealth and poverty in Italy, he writes: "The gap would have to be calculated in social light years."

[DAVID G. FARRELLY]

THE CUDGEL AND THE HYSSOP

Ernesto Rossi was one of the most active anti-fascists in the Resistance, both as co-editor (with Carlo Rosselli and Gaetano Salvemini) of the clandestine paper *Non mollare*, and later as a leader of the Giustizia e Libertà movement and of the Partito d'Azione. Writer and journalist, bound culturally to the school of Salvemini, he belongs to a group of intellectuals still deeply involved in political polemics. Most of them come from the Partito d'Azione or from the liberal left wing and gravitate toward the political and literary milieu of the weekly *Il mondo*. Their ideological pivots are a generic leftism, the anti-trust crusade, and an uncompromising anti-clericalism.

Il manganello e l'aspersorio (Parenti: Florence 1958) represents the natural development of certain motifs which had already appeared in Rossi's previous works and it takes its place among

the vast number of works devoted to the study of church-state relations. In 1958 such works have proliferated enormously, what with whole series of books, long articles and reportages in the magazines of the moderate left.

The publication of this book was preceded by several articles in *Il mondo* (wherein Rossi anticipated some of his remarks and conclusions) which were roughly treated by a twelve-column critique in the Vatican's official newspaper. In a reply to his critics the author referred them to the forthcoming publication of his book. And now, having read it, one can hardly maintain that Rossi's strong allegations against the Vatican's attitude toward Fascism were unfounded.

In spite of the title's easy wit ("The Cudgel and the Hyssop") and its humorous dust jacket, the book is carefully documented; one might say that it is rather a mosaic of quotations and extracts taken mainly from the *Osservatore Romano* and the Jesuit *Civiltà cattolica* and connected only by the words necessary to emphasize and unify their meaning.

The author's thesis is brought out very clearly and is completely demonstrated: the Roman Catholic Church, during the Mussolini era, steadily supported Fascism, no matter how many and how strong were its anti-clerical outbursts, no matter what the position of the Catholic Partito Popolare was, no matter how violent were the fascist attacks against Catholic unions; even in the few situations in which the Church could not avoid blaming some fascist undertakings, it was careful not to criticize the regime itself or its leader.

The value of this book is all in the documentation selected; there is not much to say about the author's theories or observations. My comments, therefore, will mainly concern the impression produced by reading the extracts presented in such abundance. Among the more general observations one might make about the way the Catholic Church behaved during Fascism, there are two, in my opinion, which are especially meaningful.

First, we find manifest in the Vatican attitude an innate, natural suspicion of liberal regimes, heightened, in this case, by resentment at having been defeated by a liberal government; on the other hand, there is a general disposition to favor conservative and authoritarian doctrines. This would be an obvious remark if considered from the historical point of view, but it should be made since Rossi is at times surprised or shocked at facts and declarations which in the light of this consideration are not surprising at all.

The second observation I shall make regards the deepest reasons which determined the Church's favorable attitude toward the fascist regime. We get the impression, from the Pope's many and often ambiguous speeches and from Catholic journals, that Fascism was supported not only and not always because of actual benevo-

lence or because of an opportunity for exchange of services, but because of a deep and dramatic fear: the fear of showing, by open opposition and consequent clear defeat, the Church's real and ineluctable weakness. Too often Mussolini had explicitly or implicitly threatened to "undust fascist clubs on the priests' shoulders;" thus, the Vatican's slogan quickly became "I shall bend but not break." If such an attitude is ethically at fault — especially if one thinks of the values involved—it can hardly be considered scandalous or surprising from a pragmatic point of view, and the Church's pragmatism measures time by thousands of years. Also, in this instance its attitude seems to have been the right one: after the storm the Roman Catholic Church finds itself stronger in numbers of followers and, in a sense, the proprietor of a state: the breach of Porta Pia has been successfully repaired. Perhaps the Vatican has some compromises to regret, but what is their importance in comparison with eternity? Catholic doctrine does not make a profession of democracy.

Many are the charges that could be pronounced against Vatican complicity: opposition to the Partito Popolare, hostility toward a popular front of Catholics and Socialists, abandonment of Catholic unions, support of the fascist electoral law that obliged Don Sturzo to resign. Each one of these charges and many others are fully documented by Ernesto Rossi, but "liberals" can feel no hatred or rancor, for democracy is their religion and not that of the Catholic Church. So, probably, in a similar situation it would act in just the same way. We would not intend any aspersion by such a statement nor is there any malice implicit: to the Catholic Church political regimes are means not ends as they may be for us; it has different rules for different games. The essential thing is to know this and not to count on the Church to support democratic altars if support involves too dangerous a risk.

Liberals and writers like Ernesto Rossi seem to be keenly aware of this. Unfortunately, the erroneous feeling of having been betrayed, together with the delusion of not being appreciated except by their "élites," allows them to fall at times into malicious and tedious polemics, dangerous for a clear perspective on the real political possibilities.

[RENZO BUTAZZI, Florence]

PETRARCH'S TESTAMENT

The last will and testament of the "first modern man of letters" is finally available in English (*Petrarch's Testament*. Edited and Translated, with an Introduction, by Theodor E. Mommsen. Cornell University Press, 1957). It is indeed strange that such an interesting document, which was first translated from the original Latin into Italian in 1557, and later also into French and German, had never before been rendered into English.

Mr. Mommsen has done much more than merely translate Petrarch's testament: prompted by a comparison of the *editio princeps* (printed in Venice in 1449 or 1500, and acquired by the Cornell University Library in 1954) with later editions of the will down to the present, he has made a thorough investigation of the complex transmission of the printed text both in its original and vernacular versions. Needless to say, although he had to send for microfilms of relevant manuscripts in Italy, Mr. Mommsen was greatly aided by the marvelous Petrarch Collection which was bequeathed to Cornell University by Willard Fiske. In the present edition, the text of the will, which is printed face to face in the original and in the translator's English version, is preceded by a long, learned introduction on the document itself and on the history of its transmission.

"I have often reflected on a matter concerning which no one can reflect too much and only a few reflect enough, namely, the last things and death." Thus begins the testament which Petrarch wrote in Padua on April 4, 1370. The testament of a man of letters who had reflected all his life on the brevity of existence and the inevitability of death could hardly have begun on a different note. What is strange is that Petrarch waited until he was sixty-six years of age to draw up a will; all the more since a few years before — as we learn from a letter he wrote to his friend Boccaccio in 1366 — he had been seriously wondering whether he would survive his sixty-third year.

Although Petrarch's testament reveals the learned man — in a couple of places he could not refrain from alluding to passages in Cicero's *De senectute* — from a literary standpoint this is one of his poorest works, probably because he had to conform to legalistic phraseology.

The poet insists that his is the testament of a poor man, not of a rich one as the "mad rabble" believed him to be. But the document itself reveals that he was not as badly off as all that: certainly he was infinitely better off than his good friend Boccaccio, to whom he left fifty Florentine gold florins with which to buy a winter garment to keep warm while studying on cold nights.

Possibly, the most interesting of Petrarch's bequests was that of a panel of the blessed Virgin Mary done by Giotto and sent to the poet by his friend Michele Vanni degli Albizzi. "The ignorant do not understand the beauty of this panel," says Petrarch, "but the masters of art are stunned by it." And so, they must have been indeed! No mention is made of what was to become of the poet's most precious possession, his library, which he once said he had adopted as his own daughter. This is all the more striking since we know that eight years earlier he had shown great concern over the fate of his books after his death. The most plausible explanation, Mr. Mommsen believes, is to be found in the fact that the poet had made previously an agreement to leave his books to the

Republic of Venice as the nucleus of a future "public library," and that when he drew up his will his books were still in Venice. Later, however, when the poet decided that he would reside more or less permanently in Arquà, he had his books sent there and disregarded his previous agreement (there is no indication available to make us believe that Venice ever attempted to lay claim to the library on the basis of the 1362 contract). Petrarch never added a codicil to his will concerning his library. After the poet's death Boccaccio was in a quandary as to what happened to his illustrious friend's books: and we do not seem to know very much more at present.

Another interesting facet of Petrarch's testament is the matter of his burial, which he actually takes up first. He wanted to be buried without pomp, "with utmost humility and all possible lowliness." He listed, however, seven different places in which he might possibly die and specifies the names of the churches in which he desired to be buried. Arquà was one of the places mentioned: and there he would have liked to be buried in a small chapel which he intended to build in honor of the Virgin Mary. The little chapel was indeed begun, but it was never finished; and when the poet died at Arquà he was buried outside the parish church.

Petrarch was a generous person, and in his will he remembered many of his friends and also his servants, present and past.

It is regrettable that the original of the testament has never been found. With the exception of a fifteenth-century copy, which according to the subscription was made from the original document, none of the manuscript copies or the printed texts ever claimed to be derived from the original.

The reader who is interested in that fascinating person that was Petrarch, and who has never read his testament, will undoubtedly enjoy reading it in the present version, but he will enjoy as much, if not more, the thorough elucidations and comments of the editor.

[C. S.]

BETTI'S POETRY

When Ugo Betti died in 1953, three of his plays were being performed in Paris. Since then his reputation as Italy's best playwright after Pirandello has been steadily growing in France, Germany and Great Britain: *The Queen and the Rebels*, *The Burnt Flowerbed*, *Crime on Goat Island* have been performed last winter in five different British towns.

But the Italians are not approving: an article in the April issue of *Comunità* (page 31) laughs at London as "the place where Betti's dramas are taken seriously." This seems to be the most eloquent confirmation of the old adage "Nemo propheta in patria" since Silone's fate of being hailed abroad as one of the

major Italian novelists whilst remaining practically unread in Italy. However, just as Mondadori goes on publishing Silone's novels, Cappelli has recently collected all the plays by Betti in a huge volume, and now brings forth the complete collection of his poems (*Poesie*, Cappelli editore, 1957).

Betti was, no doubt, a greater dramatist than a poet; yet a poet he certainly was. This book, containing the first poems of 1922 (*Il re pensieroso*), those written ten years later (*Canzonette—La morte*), the last ones published by him (*Uomo e donna*, 1937) and a series of thirty posthumous ones (under the title *Ultime liriche*, 1938-53), shows the road traversed from *Crepuscolari* beginnings to the unfolding of a mature personality ready to cope, in his verses, with the same problems that are at the core of his dramas.

The influence of Sergio Corazzini has left evident traces on *Il Re pensieroso* ("io sono come un bambino smarrito / che vorrebbe singhiozzare e non osa," page 11; "la casa ascolta con muto stupore / come quando qualcuno muore / e bisogna parlare piano," page 14; "perchè mi fate piangere? / Non facevo male a nessuno . . . / Sono un bambino . . . / Stavo buono, giocavo al sole . . . / Chiama, chiama la voce sepolta / Ma nessuno ascolta," page 72; "o mio bene, perchè non mi ascolti? / Nessuno ha compassione di me / Perchè mi fai piangere? / Non ho più coraggio . . .," page 87; and how many "fanciulli," and "sorelle," how many "dolcezze," what a profusion of "povere cose" do we find in these early poems!) But Palazzeschi is also present: "Vorrei scendere un poco / a passeggiare per questi giardini . . . / ma ci vorrebbero due scarpini," page 61; "Buona vecchietta, / il vestito nero non vi si guasterà / sotto terra con questa umidità?" page 65; "E forse le venne pietà / di quel principe così smorto! / Ma il principe dormiva. E non se n'è accorto," page 71. And so is Angiolo Silvio Novaro: "Quando il cielo ritorna sereno / come l'occhio d'una bambina, / la primavera si sveglia. E cammina . . ." page 7; "E certo una regina / per i freschi sentieri / aveva pettinato / le sue trecce belle / col pettine fatato / che butta l'oro e le stelle," page 29.

But already, in the second part of this collection, these *enfantillages* give way to a more mature inspiration: social themes make their appearance (in the two "Canti di emigranti," in the "Geroglifico," in the "Canto di operai") and so do themes of cosmic and Biblical significance ("Peccato originale," "La terra," "Luca del mattino"), while the love poems reflect more experience. Here already one begins to feel that obsession with death which will not leave the poet to the end, an obsession that is not uninfluenced by Baudelaire ("Su ogni donna, stesa e nuda, / s'avviticchia un moribondo" page 121; "Sono le mammelle un orto colmo / che odora, l'onda del ventre una cuna . . . / Ma sotto queste parole, / quando la pietra fu smossa, / c'era un doppio nodo d'ossa / che diventò

polvere al sole," page 123). More important still, it is here that the anguished question appears for the first time, the question which haunted the entire work of the playwright, in agonizing search for a reply: "da chi, perchè, padre Priore, / fu formato tanto dolore, / fu creato tanto male?" (page 104).

Ugo Betti was a judge and his very profession led him towards long meditation on the questions of evil, of responsibility, of guilt. His most important plays (*Frana allo Scalo Nord*, *Corruzione al Palazzo di Giustizia*, *Lotta fino all'alba*) are pivoted on this problem and on man's profound need to grasp its purpose. The accusation of an implacable and indifferent God who remains unmoved by the ills of the world, the reproach that Daniele addresses to God in "Fuggitiva": "You should have made us stronger, at least!" (and God answers with thunder, just as He answers to the outcry of Brand in Ibsen's tragedy)—all this rebellion is foreshadowed in these poems of Part II: ("Dio con l'occhio cieco e fisso / guarda le tenebre e l'abisso," page 130; "Tu coi lividi venti sferzavi! / Come grappoli nel tino / tu calpestavi i popoli urlanti," page 131). Likewise, we find in these poems a clear exposition of the solution arrived at by Betti, his only true solution to the world's suffering: it is pity. It is the same pity of which Pascoli wrote ("è la pietà che l'uomo all'uom più deve"—one of Pascoli's less accomplished but most fruitful verses), a socialist kind of pity manifested in a feeling of solidarity which we find in the "Canti di emigranti," in the "Canto di operai" and which will later triumph in the beautiful finale of *Frana*.

The influence of Pascoli was certainly one of the most lasting influences on Betti's work, and many interesting comparisons could be drawn between the two poets. Thus, for instance, Betti is moved—like Pascoli in the *Ciocco*—by the destinies of the earth and the stars and planets, and finds poignant and dramatic accents in describing the aimless erring of the earth, cold and extinguished, in the immensity of space. And like Pascoli, Betti is driven towards the comfort of tender family affections as a refuge from evil and the ever haunting presence of death. This fearful presence and those tender affections have been his most successful themes, his richest source of inspiration. Against the gloomy and haunting vision ("La morte vedemmo la morte, / su noi, suoi figli, da tutte le porte, / nei ventri pregni, su ogni sorte, / la morte, la morte, / sul grande stento senza frutto, / sopra la luce, sopra tutto," page 133) rises, in contrast, the sweetness of the good things in life, love's ecstasy, the quietness of family life, the tender love for a child. These are the motives that we find developed in the third part of the collection and around these evolve Betti's poems which, we feel, will resist time and oblivion: "Uomo è donna," "Un Giorno di giovinezza," "Le mogli" and, above all, that delightful poem called "Bambina" ("Prediletta dai padri è la bambina / Ella è sui compiti, agretta / la voce ancora, ruvida la manina. / Domani il seno giovinetto in ansia / timidamente premerà la veste . . .")

in which subtlety of feeling, acceptance of life, and a felicitous restraint of language are happily combined.

The last part of the book, posthumous, is still centered on these themes, but no longer with that delicate measure. "La fiducia del bambino," "Ritorno del padre," "Udendo, dalla stanza vicina, le voci dei familiari" do not reach the high level of "Bambina," because they try to say too much and because they take on a discursive, almost polemical tone, rather than remaining in the more restrained, allusive style of the latter. Verbosity, excessive sententiousness, and prolixity are, as we well know, the defects of Betti's last plays. Here too, it would seem, a close parallel can be drawn between the poetic and the dramatic production of the author.

The continuity of an anti-realistic, anti-photographic, transfigurative — in short, poetic — attitude in Betti's theatrical work finds its counterpart in the development of his poetic output: from the plain and naïve fairy tales of the first book to the more deliberate and intentional allegories of the last. One thing, however, seems astonishing: while the themes of pity, of responsibility, of justice, which inspired Betti's dramas have found a resounding echo in his poems, one theme, that of sexual obsession which is the bedrock on which one of his most famous and most controversial drama, "Crime on Goat Island," is built, is nowhere found recurring in his verses. This, perhaps, is one more proof that this particular drama is truly an exception among Betti's works.

[FILIPPO DONINI]

THE FLAMING HEART

Mario Praz's *The Flaming Heart*, made handsomely and inexpensively available in an Anchor paperback original (Doubleday and Company, New York, 1958) is something more than a welcome collection of essays both old and new by this distinguished critic and scholar. Subtitled "Essays on Crashaw, Machiavelli, and Other Studies in the Relations between Italian and English Literature from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot," the volume represents, I think, an exemplification of a concept of literary history much needed in these times of Oxonian and Cantabrigian compilations of chronologies, summaries, and idiosyncratic views.

The Flaming Heart (the title derives from the essay on Crashaw and the Baroque) collects some of the essays on Italian-English literary relations that Praz has produced during the past thirty years. They include essays originally written in English, and the author's own English version of those first published in Italian. The student of Renaissance literature is particularly gratified to find here, for example, the influential essay on "The Politic Brain: Machiavelli and the Elizabethans," which hitherto has been not easily accessible in the volume of British Academy lectures where

it first appeared in 1928. It is also good to find here, for the first time in English, the perceptive scholarship of the essay on Crashaw and the Baroque which appeared originally in *Secentismo e marinismo in Inghilterra* (Florence, 1925), and the broader sweep of the essays on Ariosto in England and on Tasso in England, which originally appeared, respectively, in *Il Veltro* (June-July 1957) and in *Torquato Tasso, Celebrazioni Ferraresi* 1954 (Milan, 1957). A suggestive essay on Petrarch in England is published here for the first time in any form.

But while the specialist may welcome the easy availability of these important critical documents, the general student of literature will value more, I think, the introduction to Italian-English literary relations which the volume in its entirety constitutes. Arranged not in the order of composition but of literary chronology, from "Chaucer and the Great Italian Writers of the Trecento" at the beginning to "T.S. Eliot and Dante" at the end, the series provides a clearer conception of the Italian influence on the whole course of English literature than has hitherto been possible. This fresh insight is accounted for not simply by the fact that few treatments of the subject of any sort have been produced since Lewis Einstein's classic work on *The Italian Renaissance in England*. Rather, we profit here from a concept of literary history, exemplified in individual essays and in the organization of the volume alike, that sets Professor Praz distinctly apart from the generalizing summarizers. Where the latter skim swiftly over the surface of literary events, Praz plunges in depth at selected crucial points. A good example of the approach is his celebrated essay on Machiavelli, in which detailed and carefully documented knowledge, literately presented, provides the reader with a direct comprehension of how Elizabethans (and hence generations of Englishmen after them) came to think of the Italian political philosopher exclusively in the opprobrious terms provided by the *Contra-Machiavel* of Innocent Gentillet.

The effort of such an essay — and the others in *The Flaming Heart* are like it in this respect — is to take the reader into the subject, and not pass him off with dates and titles connected by glib generalizations. The sense of penetration in depth is apparent in the opening essay on Chaucer, and in the title essay on Crashaw. Even an essay with so broad a title as "Shakespeare's Italy" achieves concreteness and immediacy through its focus on the detailed evidence for a connection between the dramatist and John Florio. A similar presentation of specific material on Florio characterizes the essay on "Ben Jonson's Italy." If the anthology seems to neglect Italian-English literary relations in the neoclassical period, it thereby accurately reflects the tenuous and sometimes hostile connection between the two cultures that Praz describes in his introductory survey, "Literary Relations between Italy and England from Chaucer to the Present" (an English version

of an essay originally published in 1948). But even in this period, the essay on "Tasso in England" provides, in a case history, remarkably fresh and vivid evidence of English attitudes toward Italy and Italian literature through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even down to the Third Programme of the B.B.C. in 1952.

The final impression of the volume, then, is that of a literary history, or more specifically, of a history of an important literary relationship, in a special and relatively new sense of the term. It is a sense suggested by Praz himself in an Italian essay on "Literary History" published in the delightful and stimulating collection entitled *La casa della fama* (1952). Here, after a review of the isolated study and the sweeping survey as methods of the literary historian, he concludes that, for himself, the basis for any approach must be specific works themselves, specifically analyzed for their literary values. The essays brought together in *The Flaming Heart*, taken separately or as a whole, admirably exemplify this concept of literary history.

[JAMES E. PHILLIPS]

A HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY

Topicality of themes, and also mere accident, seem generally to rule the choice of works for translation from Italian into English. By and large, the situation could be much worse; but the field is still wide open for new discoveries. For example, as far as I know, the work of Giovanni Comisso has appeared so far in English translation only in the Slonim and the Strachan anthologies of modern Italian short stories; and it is represented there, perhaps misleadingly though I am sure unintentionally, by the same story in two different translations.

Yet Comisso's is one of the few absolutely genuine and consistent writing talents in contemporary Italy, where his name has been quite prominent for at least thirty years. He has received also, whatever that may indicate, two of the major literary prizes, at two moments wide apart in his career: the Bagutta Prize for his book "People of the Sea" (*Gente di mare*, 1929) and the Strega Prize for "A Cat Crosses the Street," a collection of stories (*Un gatto attraversa la strada*, 1955). Now over sixty, he belongs to the generation that fought in the First War, the memory of which, to people of his part of the country (he is from Treviso, a province of Venetia), has a singularly deep, familiar resonance. He then followed the poet D'Annunzio in his 1919 expedition for the conquest of the city of Fiume, an experience partly recorded in one of his early works, "In the Wind of the Adriatic" (*Al vento dello Adriatico*, 1928). Even after that, he has managed to impress upon his life the stamp of adventurousness and of free, exotic experience. To do this he has been helped by that mixed blessing of Italian

writers' lives which is the opportunity to practice literary or "third page" journalism. Comisso's poetic itineraries through China and Japan, for instance, in the early thirties, produced among other things his book *Amori d'Oriente*, which is hardly mere reportage, but has in fact permanent literary value. Itinerant journalism, to Comisso as to many others, has meant also a closely human and aesthetic possession of the foreign and remote, which is the best antidote to conventional aestheticism in literature. One of the present reviewer's recollections of Comisso in his country house near Treviso is the writer's affectionate insistence in defining the Japanese quality of the hills near him. There is a tendency to imagine that a writer like Comisso, who is often described as a "sensualist" or something of that sort, lacks substance because of the very immediacy and gusto of his perception; the superficial critic perhaps would again insist on calling his style loose, fit to follow the whims of an intense desire to experience. But especially now that Comisso has reached brilliant maturity, such a description fits less than ever; it would be as basically meaningless to say that the impressionist painters lack substance and face life with superficial hedonism. Of course a writer like Comisso does not, by nature, succeed in the long plotted narrative (though he has attempted something of the sort in a novel whose very title, *Storia di un patrimonio*, is a program) as in the short "atmosphere" story, or also in the poetic autobiography. Even in this last genre, however, there is no writer we would feel less prone to accuse of self-pleased aestheticism or of loose, unresolved quickness of perception. Actually, I believe Comisso is above all characterized by what I would simply call professionalism; and, since his narrative autobiographical voice is that of the hero-as-artist, professionalism here means coming importantly and competently to terms with experience through his proper medium, words; it means moral seriousness.

Comisso's latest book is of the autobiographical kind; actually it may turn out to be part of a series of books of recollection, each centering on a theme. The theme here is the country house of the title (*La mia casa di campagna*, Milan: Longanesi, 1958), from the time when the author bought it in the thirties to the time when he abandoned and sold it after the War. Also as a farmer he tried to be a professional: "In undertaking this life one should have no dilettantism, but one must live it seriously, and I was always ready to jump up at any hour of the day or night and in any weather, when the land and the chores claimed it" (p. 134). Landscape and human relationship are often treated with the detachment and precision of fictional art. However, though especially in the first part (p. 30 ff., for instance) one notices a tendency to compose "scenes" of country life, there is never any preciousness about it; in fact, what I mean by detachment is nothing but the competence of the literary artist, who participates also, indeed primarily, as artist in the life of which is a member. Comisso manages to make us

feel that the competence with which he attends to his farming business has the same root as his professionalism as a literary artist. Peasants are enormously difficult to describe. It is part of Comisso's triumph that he never turns out to be either "pastoral" or "neo-realistic" and "class-conscious." Some of his country experiences are comic, some are tragic; there is no trace of either condescension in the first instance, or of sentimentalism in the second. There are passages which practically amount to short stories in themselves; there are sharply vivid moments of time and landscape; there are even aphorisms. But there is never a sense of the self-conscious set piece, or of the intentionally "symbolic" exploitation of a situation or image. Yet through these pages, even the sense of Italian history in those years becomes intensely present. To give one example, I find toward the end (p. 240 ff.) passages which constitute, through apparently casual images of young boys and girls in a stable at night, one of the most poignant views of "post-war generations" that I have encountered; and this is done, as it were, inadvertently, without mentioning the fact.

It is difficult for the present reviewer to talk objectively about this book; himself a Venice-Venetian, he formed for ever his notion of "the countryside" on landscapes and images such as Comisso here abundantly offers; the name of the place, Zero Branco, is familiar to him since dimmest childhood; his maternal grandfather is the painter, mentioned in the first page, from whose heirs Comisso bought the place. Yet perhaps such circumstances make an attempt at critical definition more attractively challenging. One single point may be mentioned: the problem of language. Recent Italian fiction, in many cases, has posed again, as in the time of Verga, the problem of the relationship between written and spoken language, and the various questions which we may summarily refer to as regionalism. It is immensely revealing to realize that this book, though in many ways unmistakably local, never for a moment adopts even the least trace of vernacular flavor for its artistic effects. The much too celebrated discussions on local and national language appear trifling and academic by contrast. So also do the mannerisms of rustic *verismo*, with which a good deal of recent literature and cinema have afflicted us. But then Comisso aims at permanence; he allows himself to write such words as the following (p. 90): "I did not know what my future was. I felt I was fighting every day against solitude, with the water up to my throat. I sensed that my life was crashing about me, I knew that everything man could do was destined for decay, for dispersal, except art. One day everything might perish, even mankind, but a work of art might still have been able to survive on the parched and deserted earth. Alive for no one, but it would still exist." And he can write this without blushing, and without making us feel that he necessarily should.

[P.M.P.]

AMERICANISTI ITALIANI

Under the enterprising direction of Agostino Lombardo three volumes of *Studi americani* (I, 1955; II, 1956; III, 1957; Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome) have already appeared. From a double perspective they can be considered significant: they represent the consolidation of serious Italian interest in American literature and they infuse fresh interest into questions that may wrongly seem trite by familiarity. Intensive Italian interest in American literature is relatively recent, though not far behind serious and comprehending American interest in American literature, and understandably it has in the past been sporadic and often injudicious. It was not, for instance, until 1932 that *Moby Dick* was translated by Cesare Pavese; and yet the genius of the book had barely begun to be appreciated in America. During fascism the image of America and American literature that took shape was compounded of a sense of discovery and perhaps an attitude of wishful thinking, not always balanced and informed. After the last war the prestige of Hemingway and Faulkner in particular, and the discovery of a richness and awareness in American literature in general (not to mention the political example of a strong democracy and the succession of superficial fashions imitated abroad), attracted foreign interest, especially among Italians, an interest which continues, now sustained more by recent American poetry and theater than by fiction. It is fitting, then, after thirty years of intermittently intensive discovery and exploration, that a calm, informed, properly critical view be taken in Italy of American literature, and, one might add, of Italy's significant experience of it. Also, it is fitting that Americans turn for refreshment to a foreign perspective on their own traditions: they may be taught to see familiar objects with new eyes and to discern the range of their ignorance.

Though unpredictably varied in subject and intensity, the many essays in these volumes show a kind of consistency. Most of them are composed as "essays" and not as "articles," if so invidious a distinction may be allowed. In other words, they usually achieve an easy relationship with the reader and they mostly succeed in avoiding stiffness and jargon (the phrase *sul piano di*, however, begins to show the luxuriance of *in terms of*). Besides, they are well informed and well documented to a point happily this side of pedantry. Most of the writers are young, versed in English and European literature, and nothing if not thorough readers of American authors. Surely no other country has produced so excellent and dedicated a circle of "intellectuals" concerned on a high level with America; not England or France, certainly. The view of American literature, as it is reflected in these essays, is governed by a conviction that a whole and separate national tradition actually exists.

Despite its hybrid shapelessness, American literature is almost the only literature foreigners still try to define as a thing in itself,

characterized by a particular race, moment and milieu. Indeed, as much as any, it can be profitably considered as a closed system. Yet there remains the present danger of mistaking peculiarities for traits. It is certainly valuable, at least temporarily, to consider the most striking and original authors: the *Studi americani* do just that, emphasizing Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and modern novelists and poets, to the exclusion of Franklin, Longfellow and Lowell. In point of quality they are not wrong, though the emphasis tends to obscure the continuous dialectical relationship between America and Europe. In general, one notices in these essays a reluctance to allow complex matters to remain complex and also a certain impatience with all that is not immediately intelligible and explicable: the exigencies of the well-made essay can falsify the natural vagary of things.

Several of the essays are too ambitious for their compass. Biancamaria Pisapia sketches her monumental theme of solitude in nineteenth-century American literature (III) with a few bold strokes that leave her no interstices; Elio Chinol, in a published lecture, delineates a recognizable, though hasty, profile of T.S. Eliot; and Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli paints nature in American literature with a technique that wavers between the excesses of generality and particularity. The best essays are those which restrict their theme and pursue it with consistent intensity. Characteristically, the commonest means of restriction is to choose a single author and consider his lifelong "development:" it is the familiar *vie et oeuvres* approach, the "spiritual biography," the "profile." There is much to be said for it. A sharply focused presentation within modest compass is often more effective than the ponderous, exhaustive "book-length" treatment so common in America nowadays. Vittorio Gabrieli's account of Thomas Paine (I), for example, is an interesting and original evocation of the radical within the conservative milieu of his day. In his essay entitled simply "William Faulkner" (I), Nemi D'Agostino arouses interest by the vigor and directness of his summary evaluation of the writer's whole career. The reader may protest that Faulkner's greatest novels, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom*, are discounted on insufficient terms, but he will find also an area of agreement in the great short stories from which he will, in his dialogue with the author, prepare a counterthrust. Even the sort of conventional survey like Sergio Baldi's essay on Emily Dickinson or Alfredo Rizzardi's on the poetry of Robert Lowell (both in II) is valuable to the reader as a competent statement of enlightened opinion and as a ground for his own meditation. By far the most disappointing performance is Mario Praz's "Racconti del Sud," a perfunctory and in some ways supercilious account of random works by Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor (II). It shows a mannered propensity, present in many other essays in these volumes, to string together passages and themes as the sole basis for characterizing an author's work. In the general case, one may deplore the too

easy dismissal of "new criticism," with its insistence on the organic inviolability of the single work, in favor of a sometimes arbitrary conception of recurrent imagery or *tematica* interpreted now biographically, now aesthetically. One may also call into question the frequent invocation, with Crocean overtones, of a vague plus-word, *poesia*: an image, a bit of dialogue or description, is suddenly *poesia* in a setting of what remains by default *non poesia*.

Exemplary essays, both for method and style, are Glauco Cambon's at times profound and consistently perceptive observations on Wallace Stevens' *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (I); Elémire Zolla's wide-ranging analysis of Melville's language, view of nature and subconscious psychology, which is insufficiently titled "Il linguaggio di 'Pierre'"; and Agostino Lombardo's illuminating evaluation of Hawthorne's first novel *Fanshawe*, which he sets in the full trajectory of the novelist's career. Other competent essays, less noteworthy perhaps, could be cited in great numbers. Suffice it to say they range in subject from Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, through the great nineteenth-century figures, to Scott Fitzgerald, Kenneth Burke, Saul Bellow, and even Lionel Trilling. Only two actually deal with literary relations between Italy and America: R. L. Gale's "Henry James and Italy" (III), which neatly chronicles James' prolonged ecstasy over Italy and his almost consistently favorable characterization of Italians in his novels; and R. H. Chase's "Cesare Pavese and the American Novel" (III), which properly discounts the influence on Pavese's fictional practice of the "realistic" American novel. One might reasonably hope to find in later volumes of the *Studi americani* fuller and more systematic treatments of mutual influence between the two literary traditions. Whatever reservations and strictures may occur to the reader (excessive breadth of subject, failure to pursue thorough analysis of whole works, facile resolution of difficult questions), the excellence and significance of these volumes must not be undervalued. They represent the freshest and most variegated interest in American literature to be found anywhere. With the example of Emilio Cecchi behind them and with the pervasive influence of F. O. Matthiessen still present, they have set about fashioning a truer image of America for Italians. That image is taking its place beside old fetishes, and superseding them, in the mythology of America which still continues to determine its day-to-day reality.

[L. N.]



ITEMS

ON JUNE 3 NEW YORK CITY celebrated the arrival of the first Italian settler in America. Pietro Cesare Alberti of Venice landed in America in 1635 and went to work for a Dutch freeholder. Later he managed independently to cultivate a tobacco plantation in Brooklyn.

IN 1957 THE TOTAL PRODUCTION of motor vehicles in Italy reached the sum of 351,799. Most of them were produced by FIAT; nearly a third were exported.

Between 1950 and 1957 clothing imports from Italy to the United States increased in value from \$160,000,000 to \$520,000,000.

MACHIAVELLI'S LA MANDRAGOLA was presented in New York recently without clamorous success.

AMERICAN ART is making a good showing at the Venice Biennale exhibition. Mark Tobey of Seattle was awarded the international (as distinct from Italian) prize, which carries much more prestige than its weight of a million and a

half lire. Other American entrants are Mark Rothko, painter, and Seymour Lipton and David Smith, sculptors.

THE LABORIOUS WORK of piecing together thousands of marble fragments discovered in a cave at Sperlonga continues with patient success. Large chunks of a statue representing the agony of Laocoön would seem to prove that the well known group in the Vatican, discovered intact long ago, is a copy.

AN ANTHOLOGY of the writing of Boccaccio under the title *Chamber of Love* edited by Wolfgang Kraus and translated by Gertrude Flor has been published by the Philosophical Library of New York.

THE AMERICAN PREMIERE of Ildebrando Pizzetti's new opera, "Murder in The Cathedral," took place on August 14 at The Empire State Festival in Ellenville, New York. Though its plot is taken from T. S. Eliot's famous play, the opera, under the direction of Laszlo Halasz, was per-

formed in Italian: Mr. Eliot was unwilling to authorize a translation into new English that would fit the music. At La Scala last season "L'assassinio nella Cattedrale" was so successful that the four scheduled performances were increased to ten.

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YOUTH HOSTELS IN ITALY number now 80 and are distributed all over the peninsula and Sicily and Sardinia. During 1957, 302,054 young people from all parts of the world availed themselves of these facilities.

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THE LETTERS OF CAMPANA to Aleramo have just been published by Vallecchi of Florence. This document should throw further light on the tragic life of Dino Campana, perhaps the greatest lyric poet of contemporary Italy. (See first article in this number).

●

THE DANTE ALIGHIERI Society of Los Angeles presented a concert of Italian Quartet music on June 15, 1958. The selections performed by the Roth String Quartet included the *Rispetti e Strambotti* by Gian Francesco Malipiero and Luigi Boccherini's String Quartet in G Minor.

●

BOOKS OF ITALIAN INTEREST recently published or about to be published include: a complete edition of *Cosimo*

Tura, Paintings and Drawings, compiled by Eberhard Ruhmer (Phaidon: Garden City); a translation of Giovanni Guareschi's latest book, *My Secret Diary* (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy), an account of his moral dilemma during the war; Van Wyck Brooks, *The Dream of Arcadia: American Writers and Artists in Italy, 1760-1915* (Dutton: New York), whose publication date, September 22, should be awaited with uncommon interest; *Editor in Italy*, by Louis Goodenough (Fairchild Publications: New York); Ernst Pulgram, *The Tongues of Italy: Prehistory and History* (Harvard: Cambridge); J. A. Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso* (Cornell: Ithaca); Ignazio Silone's latest novel (see IQ I, 1, 87-8) in translation, *The Secret of Luca* (Harpers: New York); a paperback edition of the late Domenico Vittorini's *The Drama of Luigi Pirandello* (Dover Publications: New York).

●

EDMONDO DE AMICIS' story "Dagli Appennini alle Ande" from the book *Cuore* will be made into a film by Folco Quilici. Perhaps *Cuore* should be reevaluated from other points of view as well. An essential part of Italian grade school reading for several generations and therefore "read under pressure," it remains nevertheless one of the most interesting social and ethical documents of Italy at the turn of the last century.

CURZIO MALAPARTE'S complete works will be published by Vallecchi of Florence. The first volume of this series, *Racconti Italiani* containing twenty-four short stories, has already appeared.

THE SECOND AND LAST volume of the complete Dramatic Works of Eduardo De Filippo has been published by Einaudi of Turin. De Filippo is considered the most fruitful Italian contemporary dramatist and is certainly the most popular playwright in his country.

TEN ITALIAN LIBRARIANS visited American libraries as guests of the Department of State in 1956. Their observations have now appeared in a volume *Biblioteche Americane* (Roma, Fratelli Palombi) the first such publication in Italian.

ROBERTO RIDOLFI, well known scholar of printing in the Renaissance, has just published his latest work on the

subject: *La Stampa in Firenze nel secolo XV* (Firenze, Olshchki).

A SECOND PRINTING of Walter Friedländer's *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* (Columbia: New York) is now available. The volume consists in two fluently translated essays originally published in German in 1925 and 1929. Their continuing validity, as well as their historical importance, recommend them to the attention of even the amateur, for whom the now carefully defined concept of mannerism should be part of the chronology of art. In "The Anticlassical Style" Professor Friedländer considers the mannerist styles of Pontormo, Rosso Fiorentino and Parmigianino, among others. In "The Anti-Mannerist Style" he describes the reaction, later in the sixteenth century, to mannerist illusionism and "distortion," a reaction he finds in the direct earthbound styles of, for instance, Carracci and Caravaggio.

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